

Motion Name: Liberating the Structure

Proposer: Adam Michael, Union Affairs Officer

Seconded: Saranya Thambirajah, Equality, Liberation and Access Officer

Background:

1. Bristol SU is embarking on a Representation Review. There are three major driving factors for this review
 - a. Procedural

A Representation Review was last conducted 7 years ago. The byelaws recommend that there should be a formal review of the structures every 3 years. Byelaw 0.A.1 – "The Byelaws shall be reviewed formally every three years by the Student Council to ensure that they are relevant to the membership and current practices of the Union."
 - b. Student Opinion

Students have signified their want for a democracy review by passing a motion 'Improving Governance, Democracy and Membership Engagement' at the student council in June 2021, ratified in November 2021
 - c. Levels of Engagement

There is reported dwindling attendance and engagement, specifically since COVID, and a shift in how students interact with democracy.
2. Bristol Student Union aims to thoroughly review the democratic structures, student engagement mechanisms, and governance processes. The primary goal has been to foster a more inclusive, participatory, and effective/impactful collaborative democracy within the student body. This review commenced in September 2023 to create a programme of phased and sustainable democratic change.
3. Bristol Student Union undertook comprehensive and confidential research consisting of one-to-one interviews with Full-Time Officers (FTOs) and one-to-one interviews with staff members. Additionally, there was a priority to capture a detailed qualitative understanding of the students' experience and feelings within this space; consequently, there was a dedication to conduct 8 focus group discussions in conjunction with a survey. There was also an analysis of existing data. The primary objective of this extensive research was to illuminate the intricacies and challenges within the realms of liberation spaces, student concerns, and creating change.
4. The research found:
 - a. Barriers to Student Participation: The main barriers preventing students from applying for elected positions are time constraints, lack of information, and financial challenges.
 - b. Network's Overarching Scope: The network structure is perceived as falling short of its intended function, trying to fulfil too many functions simultaneously.
 - c. Demand for Diverse Interaction Methods: Students need more varied interaction methods, including in-person and digital platforms.

- d. Perception of SU as an Obstacle: There is a perception among students that Bristol SU is an obstacle rather than an enabler, with students creating alternative speedier structures for campaigns.
- e. Desire for Immediate Involvement of Decision-Makers: Students express a need for more immediate involvement of decision-makers in addressing student concerns.
- f. Impractical Quantity of Campaigns: The current network structure is overextended with too many campaigns, resulting in unmanageable workloads and unfilled committee positions.
- g. Confusion Around Network Roles: Students are confused about the purpose and functionality of network roles.
- h. Need for Financial Compensation for Student Leaders: Students and staff have emphasised the need to compensate student leaders to enable more equitable access to these roles.
- i. Overlap and Competition with Student Groups: The networks' inclusivity of groups with shared interests creates overlaps and competition with other student-led groups.
- j. Networks' Influence and Efficacy: Students express a lack of influence and effectiveness of the network spaces.
- k. Consistency and Relevance of Networks: The success of networks is inconsistent, with some networks not having chairs until late in the academic year.
- l. Need for Clear Strategic Direction for Networks: There is a need for a consistent understanding of how networks fit into the broader strategic direction of the university or Union.
- m. Limited engagement with Networks despite a strong passion for liberation issues. Despite students' strong passion for liberation issues, there is minimal engagement with the network structure, which is an identity-based group. Networks are not attracting those students who are passionate about issues, highlighting a disconnect between interest and how students want to participate actively in liberation issues.
- n. Liberation Identities and language: Complexity surrounding liberation identities and their relevance to current students. The discussion around liberation identities is intricate and needs to be clarified with students at the heart of these conversations with humility. There were concerns about the need to protect specific liberation groups and identify where campaigns should span across networks and include allies. This raised whether identity politics within the network structure resonates with students.
- o. Limited engagement with Networks despite a strong passion for liberation issues. Despite students' strong passion for liberation issues, there is minimal engagement with the network structure, which is an identity-based group. Networks are not attracting those students who are passionate about issues, highlighting a disconnect between interest and how students want to participate actively in liberation issues. Students want to be activists about issues but avoid joining a network.
- p. Trust and anonymity: Students were hesitant and cautious about the motives of networks and democratic processes as they felt that the current approach to liberation campaigns is performative and that it *'feels like they're using you for diversity points, instead of... we care*

about your voice'. They felt listening exercises and representation roles were tokenistic and something for the Union to congratulate themselves on. Networks didn't create spaces for difficult conversations, and there was a sentiment that the Union wasn't a place for challenging conversations: *'They don't listen to people that disagree. will they listen to me?'* For those students who were involved in giving feedback or discussing, Students felt they were putting themselves in an awkward position when trying to work on decolonising the curriculum in academic spaces.

5. Bristol SU's current Liberation and student campaigning spaces exist within a 'network' structure. This has been within the focus of the representation review, the scope of which is Academic Representation, Full-Time Officer structure, and Networks. It was unanimously found to be a priority for the organisation, based on student feedback and FTO insight. The overarching urgency to begin the change focusing on Liberation is due to a lack of consistent engagement with networks, the quality of network campaigns and liberation representation. This is detrimental to students' experience and Union staff members.
6. The intention of a network, as stated by the bylaws' *1. The Union will establish Networks to create a platform for Union Officers, Student Groups and individual students to work together to build student communities and create change through collective action. Networks are representative bodies and can lead campaigns, hold forums and draft policy.'* This is currently falling short of its intended function. Its ideal aspiration is for it to serve as a space for accountability, liberation representation, and student campaigns concerning issues directly impacting them. However, this overarching scope may suggest that it's attempting to fulfil too many functions simultaneously.

Purpose:

1. This motion seeks AMM's approval to initiate systematic and phased changes in the current network structure. The SU recognises the pressing need for immediate adjustments, which this motion aims to start implementing. We also aim to lay the groundwork for a more robust overhaul of how our student campaigns and liberation representation work.
2. By securing AMM approval, we intend to embark over the next 12 months on a strategic and measured democratic change-making process to address the challenges and feedback students provided as part of the representation review. This motion serves as a crucial first step in making our liberation and campaigning framework more responsive, inclusive, and student-led.
3. The motion aims to develop new processes that make it easier for students to campaign less formally on issues important to the student population at the time. The SU aims to create more space and capacity for reactive work (i.e. Issues that arise or become important to students throughout the year), which students can get involved in on an ad-hoc basis. The motion aims to embed direct student decision-making within this.
4. Ultimately, the purpose of this motion is to enhance and elevate Bristol SU's commitment to liberation issues and how we campaign on them. We intend to make the roles and opportunities within Liberation more responsive, relevant and remunerated. Ensuring that the most marginalised communities are recognised, empowered and paid for their representative role.

Actions:

SECTION A

1. For TB2 elections for 2024-2025 we will begin the transition of our current network structure by enacting amends to the Byelaws stated in Section B with the caveat that Section B passes. For TB2 elections for 2024-2025, we will begin the transition of our current network structure by enacting amendments to the Byelaws stated in Part B, with the caveat that Part B passes. SU to concentrate on Liberation networks and forming campaign that are authentic to the communities they represent. This transition will also provide comprehensive support for the liberation networks to student groups or future PTO remits.
2. As mentioned above, in this interim year 2024-2025, Bristol SU will elect 11 committee chairs for the Networks in March, detailed in Part B. This will not include a committee for the academic year 2024-2025. However, networks can co-opt these roles if they would like.
3. There will be an option for some of the liberation-based networks, specifically those with small populations (e.g. Trans student network), to become student groups. These would be protected from specific requirements, such as the need to have 30 members to be a recognised student group. These groups will still have access to staff and FTO support if they wish to campaign on liberation issues.
4. As part of the long-term reformation of the liberation structure, the main ambition is to develop and establish remuneration for Liberation Part-Time Officer Roles. This initiative aligns with the overarching goal of the representation review. This recognises the commitment to the role and allows further accountability and expectations of the role.
 - a. Through remuneration, we aim to create equitable opportunities for students, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, to feel empowered & able to run for election.
 - b. These roles will be developed over the next 12 months.
 - c. There is an ambition to have a total of 6 PTOs,
 - d. There is an ambition to develop these roles as liberation **issue-based** instead of purely based on liberation identities.
 - e. Each PTO will have **one** clear campaign focus within their remit (e.g. Anti-Racism officer campaigning on closing the black students' attainment gap)
 - f. We will explore opportunities to have roles without a defined remit. It allows flexibility for students to decide on the most important issues to campaign on. This will provide an opportunity for fresh perspectives and ensure relevance.
 - g. We will aim to develop specific and relevant training specific to liberation issues, leadership & campaigning for these roles.
5. To explore how the SU facilitates students having a direct decision-making role and opportunities for ad-hoc Liberation campaigning during the year. Based on this, the SU will aim to develop a campaign group that uses an issues-based approach to involving students in short-term, big-impact campaigning spaces.
 - a. Students will have opportunities to make suggestions on issues to campaign on, to be directly voted on by **all** students.
 - b. Once a campaign issue has been chosen, the SU will provide opportunities for students to be involved in active campaigning around it.
 - c. Staff members are responsible for coordinating the key Union and university stakeholders to work on the issue.
 - d. This space will allow for flexible and reactive campaigning. It could lead to the immediate resolution of a problem, or it will allow for a new campaign/project group to be set up, as well as signposting people to be part of existing movements of campaigning.

6. To form a specific liberation democratic meeting where the SU's overall liberation priorities and campaign focuses for the year will be discussed. It will also act as a space to hold FTOs and PTOs accountable around Liberation.
 - a. Only students from liberation groups can attend.
 - b. Students will bring motions on liberation issues to the meeting – the SU will explore how these motions will inform our liberation campaigning focus for the following academic year.
 - c. SU to explore effective accountability measures for FTOs & PTOs at this meeting on liberation issues.

7. Commit to exploring the decentralisation of liberation representation liberation roles to represent marginalised communities within the university's new faculty structure. These reps would aim to underpin the PTO/FTO structure by being the first point of contact for students on liberation issues at a faculty level. These reps would have direct avenues for accountability, signposting and collaboration with PTO campaign officers and with ELA/ other FTOs.

8. To commit to explore the funding and role of a Liberation Awareness Coordinator. This would be a full-time staff member responsible for joining up student-led activities, offering support with event planning for Liberation and global celebrations or social events. These are not campaigns; these are awareness-based, community celebrations and national awareness days.

SECTION B

1. To amend Byelaw 7 in the following ways:
 - a. **Byelaw 7 clause 1 original text:**
 1. The Union will establish Networks to create a platform for Union Officers, Student Groups and individual Students to work together to build student communities and create change through collective action. Networks are representative bodies and can lead campaigns, hold forums and draft policy. They will undertake the following roles:

Byelaw 7, clause 1 new wording:

 1. The Union will maintain select Networks to create a platform for Union Officers, Student Groups and individual Students to work together to build student communities and create change through collective action. Networks are representative bodies and can lead campaigns and hold forums. They will undertake the following roles:
 - b. A removal of Clause 1, section a
 - c. A removal of Clause 1, section b
 - d. A removal of Clause 2
 - e. A removal of Clause 3
 - f. **Byelaw 7 clause 4 original text:**
 4. Student Council will be authorised to approve the change of Network names and the relevant byelaws, without further byelaw approval being required (as long as it comes from

and is agreed by the relevant network members). Union Networks will include the following.

- a. Sport Network
- b. Societies Network
- c. Volunteering & Fundraising Network
- d. Education Network
- e. Postgraduate Network
- f. International Students' Network
- g. Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic Students' Network
- h. LGBT+ Students' Network (name to be confirmed by Standing Committee)
- i. Trans Students' Network
- j. Women Students' Network
- k. Disabled Students' Network
- l. Widening Participation Network
- m. Wellbeing Network
- n. Multifaith Network
- o. Mature Students, Parents and Carers Network
- p. Care Leavers and Estranged Students Network
- q. Black Students' Network
- r. Sustainability Network

Byelaw 7, clause 4 new wording:

4. Union Networks will include the following.
 - a. Volunteering & Fundraising Network
 - b. International Students' Network
 - c. Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic Students' Network
 - d. LGBT+ Students' Network
 - e. Trans Students' Network
 - f. Women Students' Network
 - g. Disabled Students' Network
 - h. Multifaith Network
 - i. Mature Students, Parents and Carers Network
 - j. Care Leavers and Estranged Students Network
 - k. Black Students' Network

g. **Byelaw 7 clause 8 original text:**

8. Liberation Networks may elect delegates to NUS liberation conferences.
 - a. If an election cannot be held in the usual way, via an online ballot, because of problems identifying relevant electors, the vote will be held at a meeting of the relevant Network and publicised well in advance.
 - b. If an election is being held at a meeting of a Network, the candidates are subject to the same regulations as candidates for other elections.

Byelaw 7 clause 8 new wording:

8. Liberation Networks Chairs will be the default delegates to attend NUS liberation conferences, in the event they cannot attend, they may nominate a member of their network or a Full-Time Officer to attend in their place.

- h. A removal of Clause 11
- 2. To amend Byelaw 8 in the following ways:
 - a. A removal of Clause 18, section a
 - b. **Byelaw 8, clause 19 original text:**
 - 19. The Chairs of Networks will include:
 - a. Chair of Sport Network
 - b. Chair of Societies Network
 - c. Chair of Volunteering & Fundraising Network
 - d. Chair of Education Network
 - e. Two Co-Chairs of Postgraduate Network, one each from the PGT and PGR membership of the network
 - f. Chair of International Students' Network
 - g. Chair of Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic Students' Network
 - h. Chair of LGBT+ Students' Network (name to be confirmed)
 - i. Chair of Trans Students' Network
 - j. Chair of Women Students' Network
 - k. Chair of Disabled Students' Network
 - l. Chair of Wellbeing Network
 - m. Chair of Widening Participation Network
 - n. Chair of Multifaith Network
 - o. Mature Students, Parents and Carers Network
 - p. Care Leavers and Estranged Students Network
 - q. Chair of Black Students' Network
 - r. Chair of Sustainability Network

Byelaw 8, clause 19 new wording:

- 19. The Chairs of Networks will include:
 - a. Chair of Volunteering & Fundraising Network
 - b. Chair of Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic Students' Network
 - c. Chair of LGBT+ Students' Network
 - d. Chair of Trans Students' Network
 - e. Chair of Women Students' Network
 - f. Chair of Disabled Students' Network
 - g. Chair of Multifaith Network
 - h. Mature Students, Parents and Carers Network
 - i. Care Leavers and Estranged Students Network
 - j. Chair of Black Students' Network
 - k. Chair of International Students Network

