Motion Name: Liberating the Structure

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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 3/4 years.
    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: 'T*hey 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. It is 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 campaigns 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. This will take effect after the interim year.

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). PTOs will not however be restricted to this one campaign and will have sight of other relevant work for their remit.
   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. In the coming year we aim to create a process which will allow the student body to have a direct decision-making role in ad-hoc Liberation campaigning. Through 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 a new structure for liberation representation within faculties. These reps would be a first point of contact for liberation issues at faculty level and collaborate with other relevant union officers.

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

Rationale:

As we move toward the new system laid out in Part A of this motion, it is prudent for us to lay the groundwork and to allow the current system to evolve during a transition year. The aim of these amendments is to create a much more flexible structure, which will remove burdensome requirements from network chairs, and will allow them, and the SU structures around them, to begin the transition toward the model laid out in Part A of this motion.

Actions:

Below is how the new Byelaws will read after amendments:

1. For the Byelaws to be amended to read as follows:

Byelaw 7:

Union Networks

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:

a. Act as a consultative body for relevant Full-Time officers and support them in progressing work relevant to the Network

b. Scrutinise the work of associated Full-Time Officers and propose a motion of censure to Student Council where they are disappointed in the actions of a Full-Time Officer

c. Consider informal proposals from Student Members, which they can progress if they are within the scope of their agreed terms of reference. Alternatively, they can propose policy to Student Council.

d. Act as consultants on the wider work of the Union and the University as it pertains to their remit.

2. 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 (name to be confirmed by Standing Committee)

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

Liberation Networks

5. The following Networks will be Liberation Networks:

a. Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic Students' Network

b. LGBT+ Students' Network

c. Women Students' Network

d. Disabled Students' Network

e. Trans Students' Network

f. Black Students' Network

6. Liberation Networks will be open to all who self-identify into the groups of students they represent

7. Liberation Networks may maintain their own terms of reference, but these will not supersede the byelaws

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

Membership

9. Each Network will be convened by an elected Chair as described in Byelaw 8

10. Each Network will include the participation of at least one associated Full-Time officer 11. Networks may elect, or if appropriate co-opt, a committee annually to perform work on behalf of the Network and the Union; the Network will be held responsible for the conduct of its committees

12. Unless otherwise stated in its terms of reference and approved by the Student Council, each Network shall be open to any Student Members of the Union

13. Networks may, regularly or on an ad hoc basis, invite non-members of the Union to attend, as the Chair feels appropriate Reporting

14. Networks must submit reports to Standing Committee as requested by the Student Members

Byelaw 8:

(Byelaw 8, Clauses 1-17 and 20 onward to remain unchanged)

Chairs of Networks – Part Time Voluntary Roles

18. General responsibilities of Chairs of Networks include:

    a. Being accountable for the Network they convene, ensuring it upholds Union policy and acts in the best interests of the relevant Network's members.

    b. Joint responsibility with the relevant Full-Time Officers for gaining and disseminating knowledge about relevant policy development locally and nationally and gaining student opinion and feedback on issues relating to their role.

    c. Scrutinising the work of Full-Time Officers and ensuring that it is inclusive of matters pertaining to the role of their Network.

    d. Through the Standing Committee, scrutinising the work of all Networks and ensure they are acting in the best interests of members.

    e. Attending Student Council and its Standing Committee and reporting on the activity of the Network when asked.

    19. The Chairs of Networks will include:

a. Chair of Volunteering & Fundraising Network

b. Chair of the International Students' Network

c. Chair of Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic Students' Network

d. Chair of LGBT+ Students' Network (name to be confirmed)

e. Chair of Trans Students' Network

f. Chair of Women Students' Network

g. Chair of Disabled Students' Network

h. Chair of Multifaith Network

i. Mature Students, Parents and Carers Network

j. Care Leavers and Estranged Students Network

k. Chair of Black Students' Network

Other Officers of the Union

Chair of Student Council

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2. Below is an enumeration of the changes required to make this change. Should there be any dispute or confusion over the numbering of the byelaws mentioned, it will be at the discretion of the Union Affairs Officer, DSC and Trustee Board to ensure the appropriate edits are made to ensure the byelaws read exactly as laid out in Action 1
A. Within Byelaw 7.1 - Delete "establish" and replace with "maintain select", delete "and draft policy" and correct syntax in accordance.
B. Delete 7.1.a
C. Delete 7.1.b
D. Delete 7.2
E. Delete 7.3
F. Delete 7.4 and replace with "Union Networks will include the following"
G. Delete 7.4.a
H. Delete 7.4.b
I. Delete 7.4.d
J. Delete 7.4.e
K. Delete 7.4.l
L. Delete 7.4.m
M. Delete 7.4.r
N. Delete 7.7 and replace with "Networks may maintain their own terms of reference, but these may not supersede the byelaws"
O. Delete 7.8, including 7.8.a. and 7.8.b, and replace with "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"
P. Within 7.10 - Delete "as specified in Byelaw 8"
Q. Within 7.11 insert "or if appropriate co-opt" between "elect" and "a"
R. Within 7.14 Delete "Student Council and its"
S. Delete 8.18.a
T. Delete 8.18.g
U. Delete 8.19.a.
V. Delete 18.19.b
W. Delete 18.19.d
X. Delete 18.19.e
Y. Delete 18.19.l
Z. Delete 18.19.m
AA. Delete 18.19.r

3. In order to bring the remainder of the byelaws in line with the amendments made, the following:
A. Within Byelaw 2.5 Delete "as defined in Byelaw 7"

B. Delete 2.6
C. Within 5.10 Delete "if proposals sit within their standing mandates."
D. Delete 6.12.e
E. Delete 8.11.k and replace with "Support Networks as appropriate"
F. Within 8.12 Delete "and for convening and developing a postgraduate network"
G. Delete 8.12.f and replace with "Support Networks as appropriate"
H. Delete 8.13.h and replace with "Support Networks as appropriate"
I. Delete 8.14.e and replace with "Support Networks as appropriate"
J. Delete 8.15.h and replace with "Support Networks as appropriate"
K. Delete 8.16.d and replace with "Support Networks as appropriate"
L. Delete 8.17.f and replace with "Support Networks as appropriate"
M. Within 8.26 Delete "and the Education Network, and to act as a member of the Education Network Committee."