

Motion Name: Updating our byelaws to align with current practice in relation to Associate Membership and provisions to support student groups through the transition.

Proposer and Seconder: Full-Time Officer Team

Background:

1. The Associate Membership Scheme allowed members of the public, who were not registered students at the University of Bristol, to purchase SU membership in order to participate in affiliated student groups.

As a result of serious complaints about associate members, and in response to student concerns about how misconduct is addressed, in 2024 Bristol SU launched a review of our Code of Conduct.

The recommendations included that any disciplinary processes need to be victim-centred and trauma-informed, and that we need to ensure student groups are inclusive, welcoming and safe environments for all students. It committed us to reviewing the associate membership scheme and considering ending it.

2. The SU has a Board of Trustees, consisting mostly of elected students, who commissioned Atkinson HR to lead the review of the Associate Memberships scheme. Atkinson HR took on feedback from student group leaders, SU staff and trustees, and key university contacts. Groups with registered associate members were additionally invited to have an interview to share their thoughts.

The review acknowledged the benefits of associate membership, particularly the experience non-students could bring to groups. However, it also highlighted significant risks:

- i. **Safeguarding:** Associate members do not go through the same checks or systems as students, which means we don't have access to important information that helps us safeguard student groups.
- ii. **Managing conduct:** In cases of misconduct for non-students, the highest sanction the SU can apply is removal from membership, which is not sufficient. For student-to-student misconduct the university has a specialist team, but they won't investigate a non-student.
- iii. **Charitable purpose:** Bristol SU is a charity for University of Bristol students, meaning its resources must go to current students. Our charitable purpose does not extend to non-students.
- iv. **Insurance:** The SU's insurance is for students. Without insurance, students, student groups, and the Student's Union can be liable for the costs of legal claims.

3. In April 2025, Trustees voted to cease Associate Membership, alongside exploring reciprocal membership with other Student Unions'.
Since the decision, we have engaged and communicated with student group leaders in the following ways:
 - i. Published the full review report and FAQs on our website.
 - ii. Responded to and met with representatives of the open letter signatories.
 - iii. Scheduled drop-ins and had 1:1 meetings with 30+ student groups.
 - iv. Produced FAQs about non-student engagement with events and shows.
4. To protect the positive contributions of non-students whilst upholding safeguards, and as an SU we have also:
 - i. Introduced a **Coach, Instructor and Skilled Volunteer Scheme** which captures the knowledge and expertise that some associate members previously brought to student groups. This provides a structured framework which satisfies insurance and safeguarding requirements, while allowing student groups to choose how non-students engage with them.
 - ii. Pledged £10,000 of funding through our new **Safety Training Fund**, helping students gain qualifications to lead the activities of their group, making them safer and able to sustain their activities long term.
 - iii. Begun productive conversations with UWE SU about a **reciprocal membership agreement**, allowing students from each institution to join student groups of the other. The aim is to have the UWE agreement drafted and the respective reciprocal membership schemes open by the end of TB2. Following this we will seek to get similar agreements in place with other local SUs by Welcome 2026. Any reciprocal membership agreements will rely on agreement and support from both SUs and both universities.
 - iv. Started working on improved ways for **groups to engage with alumni** to support their activity. This will include guidance for groups on building and maintaining an alumni network, but is not an alternative method of group membership.

Purpose:

1. Only trustees can approve associate members, and Trustees have set out that they will no longer do so. This motion updates our byelaws to reflect that position, by removing the Associate Membership section and references to Associate Membership. This motion does not impact the trustee decision to cease approving associate members.
2. As well as ensuring our byelaws match our current practice, passing this motion reaffirms the SU's commitment to:

- i. Further developing our coaches, instructors and skilled volunteers scheme
 - ii. Providing £10,000 of ongoing funding for student training through our safety training fund
 - iii. Seek reciprocal membership agreements with other local SUs
 - iv. Developing guidance for groups who wish to develop an alumni network, and developing a broader Friends of Bristol SU scheme to communicate with engaged students after graduating.
3. These points have been shaped by students in 1:1s and the SU is committed to collecting and acting on student feedback for all of the above

Actions:

1. To amend the byelaws as appropriate to enact the change described above. The required amendments will be enumerated below. 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 and DSC to ensure the appropriate edits are made and renumbered as appropriate.
 - i. Delete “Associate Membership” from the *Commonly Used Terms* section of the byelaws
 - ii. Delete 1.1.c
 - iii. Amend 1.2 to read as follows - “Where payment for activities and services is due, the Union may award different rates of entry for Student Members, Company Law Members and Reciprocal Members.”
 - iv. Delete 1.6
 - v. Delete 1.7
 - vi. Delete 1.8.a - 1.8.d (inclusive)
 - vii. Delete 1.12
2. The SU will further develop the coaches, instructors and skilled volunteers scheme, by seeking feedback from the student groups who make use of the scheme.
3. The SU will commit to £10,000 annual of funding for student training at least 3 years, through our safety training fund. We’ll monitor who benefits from this fund to make sure that it is fair and equitable.
4. The SU will further progress conversations about a reciprocal membership arrangement with UWE SU in, with the aim of having a scheme in place by the end of TB2.
 - a. Once a UWE agreement is in place, the SU will seek to make similar arrangements to other local SUs by Welcome 2026

5. The SU will develop guidance and support for groups who wish to maintain an alumni network and develop a broader Friends of Bristol SU scheme to communicate with engaged students after graduating.