

Policy Briefing Pack

11th May 2017

Term 3, 2017

Getting your feedback on ideas is an extremely important part of the Policy Process at YUSU. A lot of the Ideas we get from students and societies can be actioned immediately, but there are some where we need feedback from the student body before a decision can be made. Even on occasion, there may well be instances where further resource assessments need to be made or the implications need to be discussed more fully by the Board of Trustees, who have a constitutional role that includes the examination of policies with significant financial or organisational implications.

This pack is being sent out through our Networks (each headed by a Part-Time Officer), our Colleges and via the Full-Time Officer team so that it can reach as many members as possible, leaving us with a broad range of feedback that best represents our student body.

The pack is designed to give you the information you need to make a decision / give feedback on whether or not you believe that YUSU should adopt these Ideas as policy. To reflect the views of proposers, their ideas are included verbatim below. Prior to the distribution of this briefing pack, the PRG has sought to advise policy proposers on making sure their policies are feasible, comprehensible and presentable.

There are five motions in this briefing pack:

1. Creation of a 'Working Class & Social Mobility Officer'
2. Creation of an 'Interfaith Officer'
3. YUSU to follow NUS's 'Liber8 Education' campaign
4. Liberation Networks to elect their own delegates to NUS conferences
5. Reservations for student delegates in NUS delegate elections

The Policy Review Group, working with the Full-Time Officer team and YUSU's Democracy & Campaigns Coordinator, look through the feedback and try to determine:

- Whether the feedback is substantial / representative enough of the student body to be taken into consideration, and
- Whether or not the feedback showcases consensus on an idea.

If there is positive consensus on an idea it will become active policy. If there is negative consensus on an idea it will not. If there is a very mixed reaction and no common consensus reached, then the idea will be moved to a referendum.

Proposal 1

Working Class & Social Mobility Officer

Submitted by: Jacob Webb and Michaela Tharby (Women's Officer, YUSU)

Proposers' summary: this idea advocates the creation of a part-time Working Class & Social Mobility Officer to be an advocate for and represent the interests of students from a lower socioeconomic background. Working-class students often feel isolated, and are less likely to do as well in educational attainment.¹ This officer position would work to fix this, and make sure York is a leader in working-class participation.

This union notes:

1. At present there is no specific part-time officer to represent students who suffer from financial difficulties, and to tackle the often exclusionary experience of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.
2. The Social Mobility Commission's State of the Nation 2016 report warns that Britain has a deep social mobility problem and that class inequalities are getting worse. The Social Mobility Commission also states that from childhood "through to universities and the workplace, there is an entrenched and unbroken correlation between social class and success".²
3. There is an attainment gap between working-class and middle-class students and many working-class students find university life much more difficult.³
4. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to involve themselves in extra-curricular activities, often due to economic or cultural barriers to participation, and are more likely to drop out of university.⁴
5. While supporting working-class students and students in financial need is part of the Community and Wellbeing Officer's role as well as in the remit of all sabbatical officers, they are not necessarily working-class or have not suffered financially at university.
6. The workload and extent of the Sabbatical Officers is very broad – and so a continued and sustained focus on the interests of the working-class students who suffer from financial difficulties can be incredibly difficult.
7. Universities such as School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), King's College London, St. Hilda's College Oxford, London School of Economics (LSE) and Manchester have created a Working Class Officer position.
8. The values of YUSU are: For, With And By Students, Brave and Inclusive.

This union believes:

¹ [J. Geverts, 'Working-class students: 'there's a constant feeling you don't belong,' *The Guardian* \(2014\)](#)

² ['State of the Nation report on social mobility in Great Britain,' *Social Mobility Commission* \(2016\)](#)

³ [Geverts \(2014\); C. Crawford, 'Socio-economic differences in university outcomes in the UK: drop-out, degree completion and degree class,' *Institute for Fiscal Studies Working Paper* \(2014\)](#)

⁴ [K. Purcell et al., 'Futuretrack Stage 4: Transitions into employment, further study and other outcomes,' *HECSU Summary Report* \(2013\), p. 8; A. F. Vignoles and N. Powdthavee, 'The Socioeconomic Gap in University Dropouts,' *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy* 9.1 \(2009\)](#)

1. As with all liberation positions, it is important to have a person who identifies with and understands the interests of that subgroup to lead debate about issues that affect them.
2. Such a position is urgently needed in the context of falling attendance of poorer students at Russell Group universities, and the isolation many working class students feel.⁵
3. Although there are considerable efforts to widen educational participation before university, there are almost no equivalent efforts to ensure that there is sustained access to support for working-class students whilst at university.⁶
4. Deciding the name of a relevant role and whom exactly its remit should include is not simple, and would need further consultation. A similar definition to that found at the University of Manchester should be introduced for the proposed York Officer, whereby candidates must "self-identify as working-class" and either be a care leaver, the first in their family to go to university, or be a recipient of the Manchester Bursary.⁷
5. Many opportunities, such as internships specifically open to students from a lower socioeconomic background, fail to be properly advertised to students within this group and lack strong points of contact.
6. The creation of a Working Class Officer would provide further representation to a marginalised group.

This union resolves:

1. For the creation of a part-time Working Class & Social Mobility Officer to be added to the officer group as a Part-Time Officer, elected by the student body in the same elections as other Part-Time Officers.
2. The duties of the officer will be:
 - a. To represent the interests of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds on campus.
 - b. To campaign and lobby the university in the interest of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
 - c. To coordinate opportunities for working-class students.
3. For the officer to chair a self-identifying network of people who are care leavers, the first in their family to go to university, or are recipients of the York Bursary.

Sponsors:

Michaela Tharby (Women's Officer at YUSU, Former Chair of York Labour Club)

Jacob Webb (Former YUSU Environment and Ethics Officer)

Sophie Jorgensen-Rideout (Former University of York Labour Club Chair)

Connor Drake (University of York Green Party Chair)

Max Flynn (Former James College Chair)

Liam Penny (University of York Labour Club Treasurer)

James Harland (Postgraduate Tutor in the Department of History, University of York Labour Club Former Postgraduate and Mature Students' Officer)

⁵ [P. Smyth, 'Accents to 'chavs': we need to talk about class at University,' *The Student Newspaper* \(2017\)](#)

⁶ [OFFA and the University of York, *Access Agreement 2017/18*](#)

⁷ [J. Gray, 'Working Class Officers To Be Appointed At Manchester University To Represent Less Well-Off Students,' *The Huffington Post* \(2017\)](#)

Oliver Grey (University of York Green Party Campaigns Officer)
Josh Foskett (University of York CND Chair)

Proposal 2

Interfaith Officer

Submitted by: Dominic Smithies (Community & Wellbeing Officer, YUSU)

Why? Context? Benefit?

I've submitted this policy because I believe there are a number of student groups on campus that don't have representation, that there is a need not being met and that there would benefit from having it.

This policy will address a lack of representation, put faith activity on the YUSU platform and help co-ordinate a lot of societies and groups already doing a lot of work on campaigns and events in a more holistic way.

We've seen a growing number of faith societies over the past few years running events & activities for students but also serving a sort-of representative function, even though societies shouldn't exist to fulfil that purpose - this only goes to show there is a demand for representation and clearly a large amount of work to be done under the remit of an inter-faith officer (some examples of which, I'll include below).

Further, students who engage less in University & Student Union (SU) politics and opportunities tend to be those who don't have representation. I'd like to see this role & network promoting the various opportunities available across campus and encouraging students of faith to engage more in SU politics.

How it'll work

I would envisage to exist in the same way most of the networks & Part-Time Officers (PTO) do:

- A network exists with lots of convenors representing particular groups in the network (Muslim students, Catholic students, for example). And these convenors could come from the pre-existing faith societies we have on campus, following a similar model to the International Students' Association in how all the societies come together in the network.
- Up to two PTOs are elected during the YUSU Elections to serve the same term the other PTOs do (Summer term - Summer term). They have to self-identify as having a faith.
- The PTOs have a representative function as well as leading the inter-faith network in running events, activities and campaigns.
- The Network can consist of Convenors who represent particular faiths to ensure all student groups have a voice and can campaign on particular issues, similar to how the LGBTQ Network has a wide range of convenors to cover as many sexuality & gender identities.
 - As mentioned above, those convenors can be drawn from the societies that already exist.
- The PTOs will be a part of the Officer Group as all the other PTOs are and will hold the University & Student Union to account in ensuring everything is inclusive and

accessible as possible - particularly in regards to paying attention to religious holidays and pushing for reasonable adjustments to be made.

- The typical PTO budget is £300. YUSU should look into the feasibility of adjusting their budgets to accommodate.
- This position will be in place within two years' time.

Examples of events/campaigns they might work on

To demonstrate an idea of what the PTOs and the Network might do, I've included, for example, some campaigns/events that pre-exist, have occurred this year and/or would be good to exist but would be good to be led by faith groups:

- Holocaust Memorial Day
- Islamophobia Awareness Month
- CU Week
- Challenging university timetabling - particularly around assessments - and campaigning for reasonable adjustments for affected students.
- Celebrating religious holidays.

I believe there is widespread support for this proposal among students.

Proposal 3

YUSU to follow NUS's 'Liber8 Education' campaign

Submitted by: Dominic Smithies (Community & Wellbeing Officer, YUSU)

YUSU stands in solidarity with the NUS's 'Liber8 Education' campaign and its principles. This is a positional policy that would reflect a consensus of opinion, but not require campaign action.

The priorities of the campaign are as follows: ...'

Liber8 Education identifies our clear vision for what an education sector which truly works for all would look and feel like, focussing on eight core campaign areas and asks;

1. Fight fees and cuts

Government reforms are turning education into a business and students into consumers. Education must be a public good, ensuring it is open to all, regardless of their ability to afford it.

2. Affordable housing for all

Students – like everyone else - deserve decent and affordable housing.

3. Liberate the curriculum

We all deserve equal opportunities. Education must be accessible and representative for all.

4. Invest in FE

Colleges must remain open, funded, and focused on the needs and welfare of the students, staff and communities they serve.

5. Scrap Prevent - Students Not Suspects

The exchange of ideas and free pursuit of knowledge must not be criminalised. Students and lecturers should be free to teach, learn, and debate without fear of repression.

6. It Stops Here – tackling sexual violence

Women have a right to study and teach, free from harassment, objectification, sexual violence and any oppression.

7. More for mental health

Poor student mental health is a deeply worrying indication of the current state of our education system. We need more and better services, available to all.

8. Defend international students and migrant rights

All students, regardless of nationality, should be free to study without fear of deportation, prejudice, hate or injustice.

Proposal 4

Liberation Networks to elect their own delegates to NUS conferences

Submitted by: Lucas North

This union believes:

1. That many NUS Liberation Campaigns set out Rules requiring Delegates to be elected in a process open only to Individual Members of the respective Campaigns
2. That currently YUSU Bye-Laws allow for officers to be an *ex officio* Delegate, in contrast with these Rules
3. That several YUSU Liberation Networks carry out internal Delegate elections via an Open Meeting of the Network
4. That the Disabled Students Officer role can currently be held by a non-disabled student when part of a pair
5. That there are sometimes more Officers in a role than Delegate places available

This union further believes:

1. That representatives to NUS Conferences should be members of the Campaign, when relevant
2. That these representatives should be elected only by members of the Campaign
3. That the Union should therefore always facilitate Delegate elections to Conferences, rather than using *ex officio* Delegates whenever logistically possible
4. That the Union should make an effort to increase funds available to the Democracy and Campaigns Coordinator to maximise Delegate places funded

This union resolves:

1. To delete the following sections from Bye-Law 3 [Officer Group]:
2. 27.5 Attend relevant NUS Disabled Students' conferences and events
3. 30.7 Attend relevant NUS conferences and events
4. 31.5 Attend relevant NUS conferences and events
5. 33.6 Attend relevant NUS conferences and events
6. 35.6 Attend relevant NUS conferences and events
7. 39.5 Attend relevant NUS conferences and events
8. To add the following to Bye-Law 5 [Campaign Networks], and renumber accordingly:
"5. Campaign Networks, other than the Environment and Ethics Network, will be responsible for electing delegates to NUS conferences, in accordance with the rules set by NUS Campaigns and Network Terms of Reference"
9. To add the following to Bye-Law 5 [Campaign Networks], after renumbering:
10. 7.4 The method for electing delegates to NUS conferences, where relevant
11. That the LGBTQ Network will be responsible for organising a delegate election for NUS Trans Students Campaign Conference, in which only self-identifying trans students may vote, facilitated by the Trans* Convenor or a nominated trans* student in instances the Convenor wishes to stand for election

12. That for all other conferences the relevant Part Time Officer, the Wellbeing and Community Officer, or a nominated member of the relevant network will act as returning officer as appropriate
13. That the YUSU Democracy and Campaigns Coordinator, or another YUSU Staff Member with relevant experience, will be the external returning officer for these elections

Proposal 5

Reserving spaces for students in delegations to NUS National Conferences

Submitted by: Catherine Yarrow (Women's Officer, YUSU)

This union notes:

1. That YUSU members are annually invited to vote for candidates to become delegates of YUSU to the National Conference of National Union of Students (NUS)
2. That historically, voter turnout in these elections is extremely low: fewer than 5% of YUSU members voted in the delegate elections for the 2017 National Conference
3. That YUSU delegations to National Conference have frequently been composed of more YUSU Sabbatical Officers than students

This union believes:

1. That a low turnout in elections favours candidates with pre-existing high profiles on campus
2. That, by the nature of their roles, Sabbatical Officers enjoy extraordinarily high profiles on campus than other candidates, enjoying a reputation acquired during their successful campaigning to become Sabbatical Officers and receiving regular publicity from YUSU throughout the summer period and during academic terms
3. That, by the nature of their roles, Sabbatical Officers enjoy stronger reaches of communication and greater resources than other candidates for NUS National Conference delegate, holding connections over social media with thousands of students at York and introducing themselves to many new students at the start of each academic year
4. That, for these reasons, when they stand in the NUS National Conference delegate elections, Sabbatical Officers enjoy considerable advantages over other candidates

This union also believes:

1. That candidates in elections who anticipate success may be unwilling to make manifesto commitments in the confidence that they will likely be elected regardless of manifesto content
2. That Sabbatical Officers' aforementioned advantages have generally guaranteed their successes in NUS National Conference delegate elections
3. That due to the likelihood of their success in these elections Sabbatical Officers generally do not need to make manifesto commitments in order to be elected
4. That, for this reason, policy and manifesto commitments are currently not significant aspects of NUS National Conference delegate elections
5. That this lack of relevance of manifesto and policy means that a candidate is unlikely to sincerely represent the interests of YUSU members at NUS National Conference
6. That students will be less inclined to put themselves forward in delegate elections in the knowledge of Sabbatical Officers' advantages

7. That this is, consequently, a barrier to the rest of the student body's engagement with the NUS
8. That this is also a sign of an unhealthy democracy

This union further believes:

1. That a National Conference delegation composed mainly of Sabbatical Officers is not a delegation that accurately represents the interests of students at York
2. That YUSU should not send a delegation composed mainly of Sabbatical Officers to NUS National Conferences

This union resolves:

1. To apply a quota to the delegate election count for NUS National Conference
2. To ensure, by way of this quota, that the number of Sabbatical Officers sent to the NUS National Conference must be fewer than half the number of delegates composing the delegation
3. To include in this quota all Sabbatical Officers included in the YUSU delegation to National Conference, whether awarded the role *ex officio* or by direct election
4. To amend all relevant constitutional by-laws and other relevant documentation to reflect this change
5. To apply this change to the election for delegates to the 2018 NUS National Conference and later National Conferences