

HELLO

Running from Office:

Going beyond representative democracy to engage students in educational change

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OVERVIEW



- Who is “hard to reach”?
- Reviewing our democracy
- Other models of engagement: Academic societies and networks
- The perks and pitfalls of moving beyond academic representation

Who is 'hard to reach' at Bristol SU?

Well, that depends...



Who is 'hard to reach' at Bristol SU?

Well, that depends...

- "Hard to reach" means different things for different types of engagement or activities
- Some groups are more "hard to reach" across a range of activities (PG, international, part-time, etc)
- "Hard to reach" can be very different for the SU compared to the University
- Goes beyond demographics - personality, politics, priorities all come into play
- The opportunity needs to match the individual

Who is 'hard to reach' at Bristol SU?

Representation and partnership activities

Representation and partnership activities seek to involve students as co-creators of their education. They can do this through:

- Informing
- Shaping
- Co-creating

In a representative system, co-creation often gets left to the reps. What does this mean for those we struggle to engage through this system?

Reviewing our democratic engagement

Consulting the 'hard to reach'

- Conducted a major review of our democracy in 2015/16, with specific aim of broadening engagement
- Couldn't just rely on reps and officers - needed to find those the system wasn't reaching
- Interviewed over 200 "lay students" on campus, exploring their understanding, experiences and motivations



Reviewing our democratic engagement

What were the themes?

- **Low motivation to engage** - the majority had not tried to engage with SU democracy, so motivation issues rather than barriers were the main problem
- **Time poor** - students are time poor, and must be able to understand why a particular activity is worthwhile compared to other things they could be doing - study, work, social life, etc.
- **High trust** - students seem to trust reps and officers to do the right thing and aren't strongly motivated by holding them to account

Reviewing our democratic engagement

What were the themes?

- **Personal Interest** - students want to be able to get involved if there is a particular issue or campaign area they care about, but wouldn't want to engage on every issue
- **Effectiveness** - students can perceive collective action as being a lot of effort and would need to be confident of the impact of the SU's campaigns before getting involved

Reviewing our democratic engagement

What did we learn?

- Some will be motivated to dedicate time to democracy on principle, but the vast majority will not and different opportunities need to be available to cater to this
- Engagement needs to have clear benefits - to the individual and to a cause they care about - to convince students to dedicate their time
- Engagement needs to be flexible, allowing for students to take part when they feel it is relevant

How can we provide opportunities for co-creation that meet these different needs?

Beyond representative democracy

Other opportunities for co-creation

What opportunities could our clubs and societies provide?

What can we learn from our student groups when setting up new opportunities for co-creation?

Bristol SU Academic Societies

Building vibrant learning communities

48
Academic
Societies

8042
Members

One third of
the student
population

21 Groups
between
100-1100
members

27 Groups
with under
100
members

Bristol SU Academic Societies

Building vibrant learning communities

Academic Society Drinks
run in partnership with
University

- Peer to peer support
- Forum for feedback
- Forum for engagement in educational strategy



Bristol SU Academic Societies

Building vibrant learning communities

Academic Community Building

- Speaker Series
- Parenting/Mentoring Schemes
- Alumni Networks
- Trips
- Community Engagement



Beyond representative democracy

Other opportunities for co-creation

What opportunities could our clubs and societies provide?

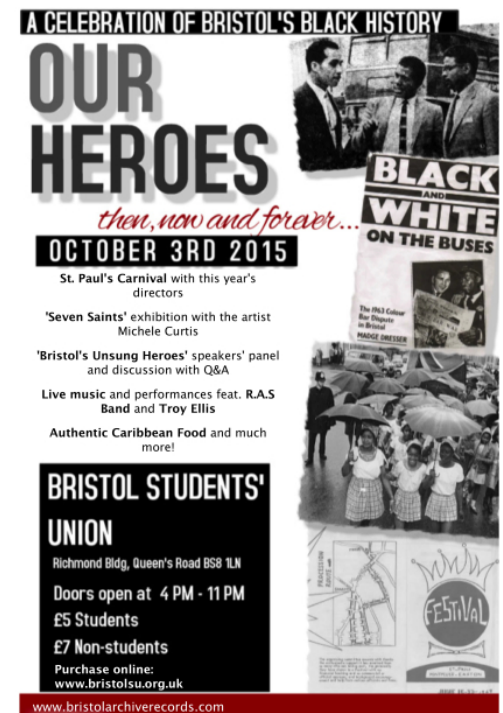
- Social engagement/benefits
- Communities that students identify with
- Flexible to engage with – engage at multiple levels
- Multiple pathways in – first step isn't running for election
 - Learn, Act, Engage, Create
- Builds networks for reps and student leaders
- Strong element of DIY, not just 'representing'

What can we learn from our student groups when setting up new opportunities for co-creation?

Student Networks

Black Students' Network Case Study

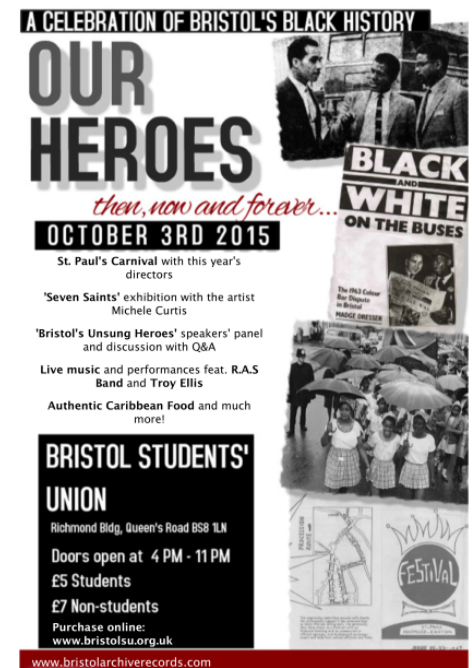
- You can join them like a society
- You can go to their events or participate in campaigns and research
- You can organise your own events, projects and campaigns
- Creates a community or network around a shared interest



Student Networks

Black Students' Network Case Study

- Black History Month
 - Speakers including Bristol Archives, Akala
- Black Lives Matter
 - City-wide demonstrations and events, worked with local councillors
- BME attainment gap project
 - Research participants and researchers
 - Be part of developing recommendations for report
- Why is my curriculum white campaign?
 - Work with course reps
 - Holds events to encourage debate
 - Liberated Library
- Work with local charities, held career events, involved in city's creative networks



The perks and pitfalls of working outside academic representation

Perks

- Provide students with rich array of opportunities (including co-creation)
- Empowers groups of students to work together with each other and with staff at Uni and SU
- Reaches students who are not motivated to engage with representative system
- Can compliment the representation system – reps able to network with groups of interested students and consult
- Builds community and pride

Pitfalls

- No clear lines of accountability
- Who comes forward comes forward
- Risk of competing/siloed interest groups
- Risk of undermining or circumventing representation system
- Risk of completely DIY (no partnership)



THANK YOU

Any questions?

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