

Proposal on the reform of Liberation and Community

Proposer: Shervin Sabeghi – Deputy President (Welfare)

Seconders: Hilliam Tung (Disabilities Officer), Miles Gulliford (CGCU Wellbeing Chair), Peter Hull (RCSU Vice President Welfare and Wellbeing), Tilivaldi Ilahunov (GSU FoNS PGT AWO), Arman Sarjou (RSMU Vice President Welfare), Chris Carter (RSMU President), Freya Hepworth Lloyd (LGBT+ Officer), Deborah Adegoke (BME Officer), Amr Alwishah (International Officer), Francesca Siracusa (Ethics and Environment Officer), Jack Hall (ICSMSU Welfare Chair), Raya El Laham (GSU FoE PGR AWO), Amna Ahmed (Interfaith Officer)

Union notes:

1. Following the first CWB Meeting of the academic year on October 15th, a Liberation Reform Working Group was set up to discuss how to improve the Union's activity around Liberation and Community. This working group met twice and the summary of this can be found in Appendix 1.
2. The role descriptions for Liberation and Community Officers are found in the bye-laws, therefore, to change these, amendments must be passed by a 2/3 majority at Union Council.
3. Imperial College Union's Constitution – the main governing body of the Union – states that 'The Union will seek at all times to ensure that the diversity of its membership is recognised and that equal access is available to all Members of whatever origin or orientation'.
4. Inclusivity is one of four core values of the Union.
5. The College have launched a new Access and Participation Plan which will greatly increase the number of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds who come to Imperial.
6. A number of student unions of Russell Group universities have introduced Working Class Officers (or volunteers to that effect). Examples include York, Manchester and LSE.
7. In 2018, York's Student's Union elected Working Class Officers and established a Working Class Students Network through a 'participatory action research' (PAR) project. This found that working class students face challenges far broader than just financial such as culture shock and 'feeling like the odd one out'. [1]
8. A 2014 investigation [2] found that for students on the same course, students from the highest socio-economic quintile group are, on average, 3.4 percentage points less likely to drop-out, 5.3 percentage points more likely to complete their degree and 3.7 percentage points more likely to graduate with a first or 2:1 than those from the lowest socio-economic quintile group. This demonstrates a clear attainment gap for students from a low socio-economic background, which currently no work is being done to address. [2]
9. On 13th January 2020, a meeting of the Community and Welfare Board voted unanimously to approve to create the officer described in resolves 1 and the networks in resolves 2.

Union believes:

1. That supporting and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion is a core element of the purpose and goals of Imperial College Union
2. That volunteers should receive sufficient support in terms of structures and systems such that
 - a. The full list of responsibilities of their roles are met, while
 - b. Not working an unreasonable number of hours towards their roles
3. That, currently, no Liberation or Community Officer represents the needs and views of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Union resolves:

1. To introduce 'Working Class Officer' as a Liberation Officer who shall
 - a. Be responsible to the Deputy President (Welfare)
 - b. Chair and be financially responsible for the Working-Class Students Network
 - c. Represent students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds to the Union and College
 - d. Liaise with the Student Recruitment and Outreach department in College – particularly on matters related to the Access and Participation Plan
 - e. Work with the Deputy President (Welfare) on matters related to representing students from disadvantaged backgrounds e.g. the bursary survey response
2. To introduce the following Liberation and Community Student Networks to begin operating in the academic year 2020/2021 with a general remit of these networks are to represent, advocate on the behalf of and build community within the students that fall under their remits. These networks will replace the currently existing 'Liberation and Community Zones'.
 - a. BME Network
 - b. LGBTQ+ Network
 - c. Disabilities Network
 - d. Gender Equality Network
 - e. International Network
 - f. Interfaith Network
 - g. Ethics and Environment Network
 - h. Mental Health Network
 - i. Working Class Network
3. In light of the previous resolves, to make the following amendments to the bye-laws
 - a. Remove bye-law F23.2
 - b. Add bye-law under section F23: 'Co-ordinate campaigns and community building within their remit by being the Chair of their respective Liberation/Community Network, as defined in the Liberation and Community Networks policy'.
 - c. Add bye-law under section F13: 'Be ultimately responsible for Liberation and Community Networks'
 - d. Add 'A32.9. Working Class'

4. To mandate the Deputy President (Welfare) through CWB to continue the Liberation Reform work to finalise details of implementation and produce a Liberation and Community Network policy by the end of the academic year.
5. To mandate the Deputy President (Welfare) to consult relevant CSPs on the details and implementation of networks for which there already exist CSPs with similar remits

[1]: <https://wonkhe.com/blogs-sus/should-sus-elect-a-working-class-officer/>

[2]: <http://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/wps/WP201431.pdf>

Appendix 1: Summary of Liberation Reform Working Group

- At the first CWB meeting of the academic year on 15th October, a paper was presented (appended below) summarising the current model of Liberation and Community at the Union and loosely suggesting a way to reform it was suggested. Following discussion about this, it was requested that a working group be set up comprising CWB members to decide how to go forward with the reform of Liberation.
- This working group first met on 19th November and then again on 25th November and had attendance by the BME, LGBT+, Ethics & Environment, and Interfaith Officer, and the ICSMSU Welfare Chair.
- The brief summaries from these meetings can be found below.
- Following the second meeting, there was agreement that formation of some kind of student networks would be beneficial, and that the DPW should talk individually to L&C Officers to establish the feasibility/sense of these networks for each Liberation area.
- There was inconclusive discussion about the creation of a L&C Officer for socio-economic class in light of the College's new Access and Participation Plan.

Imperial College Union – Liberation Reform Working Group Meeting 1: 19th November 2019

Present:

Shervin Sabeghi – Deputy President (Welfare)
Deborah Adegoke – BME Officer
Francesca Siracusa – Ethics and Environment Officer
Freya Hepworth-Lloyd – LGBT+ Officer

Meeting Summary:

The purpose of the group and what it should do was what was mainly discussed.

The key points were:

- The group's key focus should be on structural, reformative changes, rather than trying to see how things can improve in the current model.
- We should have a vision for Liberation in the future, and then this group thinks of *how* we can get there.
- Part of what the group should do is fully mapping out the current situation of Liberation to see where the structural gaps are and how we can fill them in the short and long term. This should also be informed by what happens in other Students' Unions.
- While this group won't necessarily look at editing current CWB policies, it has the scope to look at what might be missing in the Liberation sphere
- As well as working out what our ideal model is for the structure of Liberation at the Union, we also need to try and work out the details of how we can achieve that based on our current position.
- Some more focused discussion around the loose proposal of having explicit Liberation Networks that function similarly to CSPs was had, and it was decided that having the DPCS and the chairs of relevant L&C CSPs would be beneficial in at least one future meeting. On this point, everyone agreed that trying to force a CSP to become a Liberation Network wouldn't be the approach and, instead, working with individual CSPs to reach a conclusion that works for everyone would be better.

It was decided that, in the next meeting, the group will perform the mapping exercise and decide how to proceed from there.

Date and time of next meeting: Monday 25th November 2019 – 18:00-19:00

Imperial College Union – Liberation Reform Working Group Meeting 2: 25th November 2019

Present:

Shervin Sabeghi – Deputy President (Welfare)
Deborah Adegoke – BME Officer
Jack Hall – ICSMSU Welfare Chair
Amr Alwishah – International Officer

Meeting Summary:

The purpose of this meeting was to map out the roles of Liberation and Community Officers within the Union and link with College and identify what's structurally missing. The grid attached on Teams is what was come to and this is a summary of what was found to be missing:

- A committee/student network to split the workload amongst
- Full linking to College for all Officers
- Ability to reach out/access communities
- Potentially missing two areas: Working Class/Social Mobility/Socio Economic, and Mature Students

For/by the next meeting, the DPW will contact individual officers and establish the feasibility of an advocacy network for their zone. A discussion about whether we need extra zones will be discussed.

ACTIONS:

- DPW & LCOs – talk individually to sense-check advocacy networks for each zone
- DPW – map out the whats and whos of EDI in the College
- DPW – explore SES data to see what's relevant
- DPW – start establishing technical feasibility of advocacy networks

Date and time of next meeting: TBC

Appendix 2: Implementation Overview of Liberation Reform

The process of working out implementation details of the Liberation and Community Networks is ongoing. The following summarises the key points of this and progress/considerations to be made.

- Ownership and independence of the networks: the networks will be the responsibility of the Deputy President (Welfare) and CWB as they are distinct from CSPs (therefore aren't tied to the Deputy President (Clubs & Societies) or CSPB). The exact management structure and chain of responsibility needs to be decided.
- Committee: there will be a core committee that every network must have: Chair, Treasurer, Campaigns Officer, Community Officer and Communications Officer. The standing orders of each network will dictate any additional roles that are necessary for that network.
- Membership and democratic process: the networks should be free to join by any student. The LCO Chairs will be elected, as they are now, in the Leadership Elections. For 2020/21, the rest of the committee will need to be elected in the Autumn Elections, but how this happens annually will need to be decided. Furthermore, it will need to be decided who is eligible to run for the positions (do they need to be a member first?).
- Finances: there is currently £500 allocated to each LCO which can be carried forward to the networks. Furthermore, Liberation Officers have £500 available to spend on their respective Liberation months which can also be used by these networks for the same purpose. The process of allocating funding will need to be decided i.e. whether each network is assigned a set amount as they are now or if there is a budgeting process to allocate money from a central pot. Furthermore, the expenditure approval process needs to be determined.