



Ideas to improve your Union, University and City

## Better Union Agenda 20/05/24, Nathan Boddington Council Chambers, Level 1 Parkinson Building

1. The discussion of each Idea in turn:
    - a. The Student who submitted the Idea (or a nominated spokesperson) to explain the current problem, what they want and why.
    - b. Clarifications, questions, comments and change proposals from Forum attendees
    - c. Secret ballot of the Student Panel
  2. An Accountability session from at least two Student Executive Officers detailing progress with regard to implementation of Policy, questions on their current projects and questions from Forum attendees and UoL members.
  3. Announcement of Student Panel Verdict(s).
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**Name:** Emily Tabern

**Your idea:** Should LUU increase the number of student panellists that vote on Better Forums policy ideas in line with the increase in student numbers?

### **What is the current problem, and how does it affect students?**

LUU's Bye-laws state the following about the rules and function of the student panel:

- ' - A different student panel of 16 randomly selected members will attend each Forum meeting. The panel is responsible for voting on any Ideas which are put forward to the Forum.
- Quorum for this panel will be 12 members.
- As far as practical this panel will be demographically representative of the membership of the Union.'

There has been a 22% increase in student numbers since the forums were established from ~32,500 students in 2009 to ~39,000 students in 2024.

### **What is your proposed change? How will it benefit students?**

The student panel at the Better Forums should see an increase in size proportional to the increase in the number of students at the University of Leeds.

LUU should amend their Bye-laws to state the following:

- A different student panel of 20 randomly selected members will attend each Forum meeting. The panel is responsible for voting on any Ideas which are put forward to the Forum.
- Quorum for this panel will be 15 members.



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- As far as practical this panel will be demographically representative of the membership of the Union.'

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**Name:** Haryati Mohammed and Nikita Zychowicz

**Your Idea:** Should LUU take a proactive approach in tackling Islamophobia and supporting Muslim students and include Muslim students' voices in its implementation.

### **What is the current problem, and how does it affect students?**

Work done on LUU's policy (now lapsed) on Working Definition on Islamophobia [here](#) found that Muslim students would rather have a clear strategy on how LUU will collaborate with Muslim students, in its work on inclusion of and support for Muslim students.

The university is under pressure to adopt a working definition of Islamophobia. More so now with the Israel-Palestine situation in the Middle East whose effects have been felt here in the UK including Leeds. This Feb 2024 [statement](#) from TELL MAMA confirms that post Oct 7, 2023, there were 2,010 cases of Islamophobic incidents which is a 335% increase in anti-Muslim hate cases from the same period in the previous year.

LUU's engagement with Muslim students is poor, as it focuses mainly on the provisions of International students - lack of knowledge/awareness of their rights in terms of what constitutes a hate-crime and how reporting incidents works and its outcomes.

Muslim students and "settled satisfaction" - just the basic will do, ie prayer facilities, because they don't want to feel that they are demanding of the institution.

ISoc committee members can be overwhelmed by what they are supposed to provide for the Muslim student community at Leeds. Is it just to ensure resources and provisions are in place for their membership in particular and Muslim students in general which enable them to practise their faith, or does it extend further than that, eg., wellbeing support in such times when expertise is needed. When such a time when this is needed, where could they signpost students to, making sure that those students are not retraumatised.

### Prevent duty, trust and the Muslim students experience

Since 2015, it is a legal duty of universities to sign up to Prevent, which calls on those in public-facing roles to report on anyone they suspect of being vulnerable to radicalisation and terrorism ([HM Gov, 2018](#)). However Prevent is problematic as it targets black and brown communities, and most of Muslim students in Leeds will be from these communities.



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National Union of Students (NUS) has come out in opposition of Prevent citing among others

- Limited training of university staff on how to recognise vulnerable students at risk of radicalisation.
- Legal obligations that then put pressure on them to act on those who they deemed problematic or suspicious

This [2021 research](#) finds Prevent

- Create an environment of monitoring and suspicion on campus , among staff and students
- Instils fear and paranoia on Muslim students that includes questioning their identity
- Leads to self-censorship and disengagement from university life among Muslim students
- Operates on Islamophobic ideas and stereotypes and Muslims as suspects

As Prevent is a legal obligation for the university, it is understandable that a lack of trust prevails in the services provided by them thus creating an additional barrier for Muslim students to seek available support. This is then compounded by the lack of understanding of the Muslim students' perspectives and can retraumatise those who do engage with those services.

### **What is your proposed change? How will it benefit students?**

#### Implementation of:

Roundtable recommendations. Working on the recommended actions on this [document](#) informed by said recommendations, including regular check-ins with Muslim students via pulse survey).

#### FOSIS suggestions:

- Awareness of Prevent and its impact on Muslim students
- Awareness and addressing Islamophobia - comms that actually promote a greater understanding of what it is and how to address it
- Recognising policies and practices within LUU that are discriminatory to Muslim students.

#### Inclusion

- LUU to include Muslim students in any discussion that primarily affects them, beyond that of the student exec and ISoc, eg. adoption of definitions.



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- Including the local community on interfaith work, so as many students as possible feel part of Leeds and value the different community within and across campus as well in the wider city - they have active participation.
- Celebrating Muslim students, beyond the cultural calendar.

Improved signposting to third party organisations, eg TELL MAMA, MEND UK. Case studies of incidents.

Students of any or no faiths are empowered to advocate for themselves and others.

### **Have you considered the impact of the proposed change for traditionally underrepresented student groups?**

Muslim students are likely to be part of an underrepresented student group, due to the intersectionalities of their marginalised identities that goes beyond a racial one, thus are more likely to face systemic and structural discrimination which becomes barriers to participation. In particular, female Muslim students will benefit from this policy as they are likely to be targets due to their visibility in how they represent their Muslim identity.

The aim of the idea is to improve the experience of Muslim students at Leeds, so that they feel seen, valued and celebrated. That their experience and those of their community matters.

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**Name:** Hannah Catterall

**Idea Title:** LUU should train, inform and support society committee roles to be signposts and advocates for wellbeing support.

### **What is the current problem, and how does it affect students?**

Many societies have introduced welfare or wellbeing roles into their society committees; it has been generally positive and encouraged for societies to incorporate a wellbeing element into their leadership structure. However, through conversations with students who hold these roles, it became apparent that these students felt under supported and overburdened, with some members of their societies treating them as a therapist, and committee leaders not truly knowing how to support their members.

This year, I have started an initiative called the Society Wellbeing Network (SWN), with an aim to train, inform and support particularly welfare roles on society committees. The Network involved two training sessions, one focussed on how to access general mental health and wellbeing advice and resources on campus, and the other focussed on Safety in



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LUU, particularly on nights out. I also acted as an Admin on a WhatsApp chat with society welfare roles who opted in, and used the chat to direct them to resources, conduct polls, notify them of wellbeing-related events coming up, and more. Not only did this create a culture of students feeling their feedback mattered and they could always reach out for help, but it was a simple way of informing them about resources and impacting my work.

One student said:

*'after being voted for as the first well-being officer for LUBS with no handover I felt a bit lost in the role if I'm completely honest! Without your training, community group chat, and amazing resource sharing sparking me with such inspiration I don't think I would have done half the job I have.'*

This policy is a rewording and resubmission and rewording of the expired policy 'LUU should provide learning opportunities for committees that empower members to access wellbeing services across LUU and the University', which was submitted three years ago. It is still an ongoing issue, and I believe LUU needs to commit to embedding a training and support programme, facilitated by a collaboration of the Activities, Advice, and Wellbeing & Partnerships Teams, to ensure students adopting welfare roles feel properly supported.

### **What is your proposed change? How will it benefit students?**

I propose that the change continues, and is ongoing. I have some suggestions on what I would like to see going forward, based on my experience creating and leading on this project this year.

Suggestions:

- A dedicated weekly drop-in hour within the Advice service for welfare roles and other committee roles
- An online directory or videos of resources which will constitute as training, and in-person training if there is enough demand for it
- In-person socials and events for the students in the group, to allow for them to network, provide peer support for one another, speak to LUU Advice, speak to the Wellbeing and Activities Officers, etc.
- In-person consent and active bystander training - SASHA and University's Harrassment and Misconduct Team
- Activities Exec consulting and feeding back on how the development of the Network is impacting the societies and students they represent
- Welfare societies should have an active role in the development of the program. For instance, if SSAFE society thought it important to include suicide awareness training in the online resources accessible to all societies, LUU should work with them to implement this.



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- A consistent commitment to checking-in with the students adopting welfare roles and seeing if they need more from LUU - whether that be a gap in training, support, etc.

This change would hopefully benefit *all* students. LUU has over 350+ societies, and if each society has an elected or nominated person who can act as signposts, support will reach more and more students.

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**Name:** Abby Boon

**Your idea:** Should LUU end its relationship with Starbucks, through its franchising of their products in Scream?

### **What is the current problem, and how does it affect students?**

Starbucks is a multinational corporation with a long history of multiple ethical controversies and strong opposition to unions. Yet, we sell their products and promote their brand in our student union.

Most recently, the company has exploited the conflict in Palestine to their own anti-union agenda through suing Starbucks Workers United. The group accuses Starbucks of using the incident to perpetuate an *"illegal anti-union campaign by falsely attacking the union's reputation with workers and the public."* [1]

This most recent controversy, leading to renewed calls to boycott Starbucks, is an opportunity to reflect on LUU's own partnership with the brand, and for members to reconsider whether we wish to support this company in our student union.

Starbucks has fought and strongly opposed unionization for decades. They have repeatedly ignored calls for improved working conditions, intimidated union organisers, and fired those protesting unfair wages. [2]

This is all whilst continuing to underpay their remaining staff, and simultaneously avoiding paying tax on billions of pounds of global profit. For instance, in 2021, Starbucks paid just £5.4m in UK corporation tax last year despite making a gross profit of £95m in the country, and £4.9 billion worldwide. [3]

LUU's complacency in supporting Starbucks through multiple attempts at union busting undermines our values and collective power as a union of members ourselves.

Other ethical controversies at Starbucks include child labour issues, paying children under 13 as little as 31p per hour to work 40-hour weeks in unsafe coffee farms in Guatemala. [4] Or, as recently as May 2023, procuring tea from estates reported to inflict around 13 million workers with



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'endemic human rights abuses', including sexual exploitation and health and safety violations, in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Kenya, Uganda and 43 other countries. [5]

In our student union, Starbucks in Scream is part of the "We Proudly Serve Starbucks® Coffee Programme" which is run by Nestlé, Starbucks exclusive distributor of the program. Whilst run by LUU, all products are bought from the brand and sold under their name.

Nestlé has famously faced multiple international boycotts repeatedly since 1977 for their aggressive, irresponsible and unsafe marketing of infant formulas in the Global South. [6]

More recently, in 2021, Nestlé was named in a class action lawsuit by eight former child slaves from Mali who alleged that the company aided and abetted their enslavement on cocoa plantations in Ivory Coast [7]. In the same year, it was also found to be violating natural spring water resources during a drought in California, draining water supplies at the expense of local communities and ecosystems [8, 9].

The many unethical practices listed above do not reflect LUU's values on equality, diversity and inclusion, nor the views of its members in this regard.

The partnership also contradicts LUU's commitment to sustainability, and support of local economies and community. Their presence on campus offers convenience over local cafés, and its affordability impacts on independent businesses. It may even detract sales from even our own student-run initiatives e.g. the Green Action Coop next door.

As a not-for-profit charitable organisation, Leeds University Union has a moral and legal duty for the public benefit, and should not be influenced by private interests.

In permitting this partnership, LUU risks becoming less of a building run by its members. Instead, it risks becoming increasingly commercialised and led by corporate interests as opposed to the values, beliefs and politics of the student body.

In essence, Starbucks' presence in our student union:

- Supports Starbucks and Nestlé, both exploitative multinational companies with unethical and unsustainable practices.
- Directly benefits both companies through the sale of their products and promotion of their brand.
- Takes the place and profit of local, independent and community-run businesses.
- Frames students as consumers as opposed to members.
- Encourages further corporatisation and commercialisation of the student union.

## What is your proposed change? How will it benefit students?



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I propose that Leeds University Union cuts their contract with the Starbucks and Nestlé's 'Proud to Serve' programme.

With understanding of the financial complications their current commitments and decisions about annual budgets, due to end in **May 2025**, I suggest that LUU ends their relationship with Starbucks and Nestlé's 'Proud to Serve' programme on this date, and does not renew or enter into any further contract with the companies beyond this point.

This will benefit students as it will open up space for a more ethical investment or partnership in the place of the brand. It may also invite a reassessment of the Scream outlet, currently unprofitable and thus demonstrably not serving the interests of students and posing a financial risk to the organisation.

Ending the partnership with these unethical companies will align with the values of LUU and its members in wanting to champion equality, diversity and inclusion. It may also allow for more space for sustainable partnerships with local or community-run groups, as opposed to multinational corporations.

It will also lower risk and prevent any reputational damage for the organisation that may derive from its association with the controversial companies.

I suggest LUU also takes this as an opportunity to review their own policy around partnerships with external organisations to avoid future instances of unethical ties through corporate partnerships.

## Have you considered the impact of the proposed change for traditionally underrepresented student groups?

In response to this proposal, a representative of LUU said: *"International students have told us they know the Starbucks brand and can access it easily due to their familiarity with it, they have told us this has helped them when they come to a country where everything is new and different"*.

Firstly, I believe that LUU should strive to do more to facilitate a sense of welcome and belonging to Leeds for international students than selling them coffee. Even so, money spent on Starbucks products could be divested into the existing LUU-run coffee outlet Common Ground, e.g. on cultural sensitivity training for student staff, or translations of their coffee menu into common languages on campus.

I think this understanding as the reasoning for the existence of Starbucks in our SU also risks framing international students as customers as opposed to members - mirroring an increasingly concerning wider trend in higher education, with the expectation of international students becoming consumers on campus due to the higher tuition fees faced, rather than an understanding of them as individuals.





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Furthermore, this anecdotal evidence should not be seen to be an illustrative indication of what all international students think, as they, like other traditionally underrepresented communities, are not a homogenous group. Other students from international backgrounds might find Starbucks and Nestlé's exploitation of countries in the Global South unwelcoming and unsettling.

This is particularly important given that both companies' violations, encompassing labour, environment, and product safety, disproportionately affect marginalised communities. Global South groups, minimum wage working-class employees, supporters of the organic boycott - all these typically underrepresented groups are impacted by LUU's lack of solidarity with them against these corporations.

Therefore, in removing the franchise from the student union, LUU can move away from the union-busting values of Starbucks, and instead make a symbolic show of support for collective action, which will in turn make the student union will make the space more inviting and increase a sense of belonging and ownership for these communities affected by Starbucks and Nestlé's unethical practices.

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**Name:** Haryati Mohammed

**Idea Title:** Should LUU introduce paid elected part-time roles for liberation officers representing specific marginalized groups?

### **What is the current problem, and how does it affect students?**

- Lack of representation.
- Lack of strong advocacy and campaigning on liberation work that will truly empower liberation students to tackle the systemic oppression and discrimination that continues to marginalise them.
- LUU values - fun, empowering & inclusive - nice slogan lack viable proof.
- Opportunities for students to be represented by those whose identities align with theirs -greater understanding of the lived experience of these student groups.
- We say underrepresented but the actuality is that they are underserved and while allies are all great and good, it should not be at the expense of representation.

### **What is your proposed change? How will it benefit students?**

- Representation matters. Seeing themselves in elected roles inspire them. If this wasn't the case I guess the university has to rethink their WP strategy. The university and every other organisation apart from LUU, I guess.
- Also I'm tired of being approached for everything that relates to black, disabled, and other liberation groups.



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- This would also serve as a way to improve the diversity of Lead LUU candidates, as a foundation for improving not only the diversity of candidates but intersectionalities of their liberation identities. This could be done by trialling a trans student PTO.
- While the university is rich in its diversity of students LUU has still to catch up in that of its elected representatives.

Different student unions (SU) have different ways of increasing the representation of their liberation groups. Some SUs use the term part-time officers (PTO), network is also used to describe these roles. Sheffield, York, Edinburgh and many other SUs have liberation PTO or network leads who work alongside their full-time officers to ensure that liberation work continues and are led and informed by those from their respective communities.

While these roles are mostly volunteer roles, there are SUs who pay their part-time officers, such as Sheffield SU. [Sheffield SU](#) has 6 paid part-time officers (PTO), including a Mature student and Disabled student PTO, who work 8 hours a week alongside doing their studies. This year Huddersfield SU has started a paid role in organising their [LGBT+ network](#), to ensure that the experiences and voices of LGBT+ students are valued. Strathclyde SU non-executive PTO receive a monetary sum (honroarium) at the end as recognition for their service.

Having elected PTO liberation officer roles is an opportunity for students from marginalised groups active participation with structure and processes that can change the conditions of their existence while at Leeds through representation, and campaigning thus giving them the experience and confidence to engage and change the systems that disadvantages them. For example, at [Trinity Saint David SU](#), PTO attends campus council, thus preparing them for a full-time officer role should they choose to run for election. York's mature student PTO campaign on behalf of mature students so that they feel included and supported.

These are the types of students in Leeds that may have less engagement with the union in Leeds. The creation of these roles increases the visibility of liberation group students within LUU's structures. As elected PTO officer, these students have legitimacy with the university and prepare them for full-time officer roles. Furthermore, visible representation of the liberation groups students can encourage others to see themselves in such roles.

### **Have you considered the impact of the proposed change for traditionally underrepresented student groups?**

Students feel underrepresented because of the lack of representation. Most often the reason given for the lack of let's call them initiatives for these student groups is because they have not come forward to ask for it.

The onus is on the student and yet there is a lack of representatives that understand what is like to be racialised and/or minoritised like them.



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**Name:** Safiyah Farid

**Your idea:** Should LUU further support humanitarian efforts underway in Palestine?

**What is the current problem, and how does it affect students?**

With all of Gaza's universities having been destroyed<sup>1</sup>, alongside other reports from such as targeting of hospitals, schools and civilian homes<sup>2</sup>, students feel uncomfortable on campus. This has led to one occupation of Parkinson and an encampment on the centre of campus.

As PSG president I have helped organise vigils, fundraising events, forms of protest and social events to keep the student movement growing.

PSG itself has collected numerous testimonies about hostility faced on campus by Pro-Palestinian students and these have not been addressed by the union or university.

**What is your proposed change? How will it benefit students?**

An aspiring anti-racist organisation like LUU, like they did for Ukraine, should support student-led activity such as vigils or raising anti-racist awareness. LUU should also:

- set up fundraising points at cashiers for example and raise money for authorised charities such as Medical Aid for Palestinians and other humanitarian aid.
- Amplify the voices of pro-Palestinian student groups including Jewish Pro-Palestinian students and work to support them through help and support. For LUU to encourage the university to help these people too.
- For the union to liaise with the university to Investigate planting an olive tree on campus with a plaque to remember all those murdered.
- For the union to release a statement in solidarity with the civilians in Gaza and explain what they are doing to support students affected.
- For LUU to pressure the university to support Gaza's rebuilding of education systems and meaningfully engage with the demands of the protestors.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68023080>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68881325>