



Annual Members' Meeting 19/02/2015

Motion Name: A better stance against bullying and harassment

Background:

1. There is at present no procedure for students to be held to account for their actions towards others outside of university spaces, crucially in privately-rented housing. It is covered in neither the current Student Policy on Bullying and Harassment, nor The Local rules and regulations for student behaviour in the community (<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/acceptablebehaviour/studentbullyingandharrassment.pdf>, <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/accommodation/community/policies.html#local-rules.html>).
2. For many people in systematically oppressed groups, being targeted at home can be a major problem. For instance, 25% of homeless people in urban areas are LGBT (<http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/voices/2012/04/young-gay-homeless-and-likely-stay-way>).
3. The Policy on Bullying and Harassment is current being redrafted, and due for a consultation in the coming months.
4. This redraft states explicitly that “this guidance does not only apply to how students behave whilst on University premises”, meaning that incidents outside the university, including in privately-rented housing would be covered.
5. The current and new policies both include in their purview acts which play into systematic oppressions: behaviour which is sexist, racist, ableist, homophobic, transphobic, etc (<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/acceptablebehaviour/studentbullyingandharrassment.pdf> - part 4: examples of bullying and harassment).
6. At present, the university response to bullying or harassment is that a student should first try to raise the matter personally with a perpetrator. Next they should involve a member of staff – who normally have no anti-bullying or equalities training. If this does not work, the student should use the university complaints procedure. The first stage of the complaints procedure is mediation, which is not strictly compulsory, but heavily pushed. After mediation comes the complaint review panel, who may send the complaint to be dealt with by individual members of staff, dismiss it, send it to a hearing, or ask the complainants to reconsider any decision not to enter mediation. If the complaint is sent to a hearing, the perpetrator may be subject to disciplinary action in line with the student disciplinary regulations (<http://www.bris.ac.uk/secretary/studentrulesregs/disciplinary.html#penalties> – section 8.3 – types of penalty).
7. The penalties described in the student disciplinary regulations – such as fines and enforced suspensions - are punitive, and thus do not address the motivations behind acts of bullying and harassment.



8. Moreover, a punitive – rather than a reparative – disciplinary regime risks redoubling discriminatory bullying and harassment, as perpetrators may hold oppressed groups responsible for their punishment.

9. Mediation is described by UBU as “a way of helping people in dispute communicate with each other. The mediator is an impartial third party who works with the people involved so that their concerns can be addressed. The goal is to find a solution that is acceptable to everyone involved.” (<http://www.ubu.org.uk/justask/supportgroups/>)

10. The above description of mediation reflects its unsuitability for addressing discriminatory bullying and harassment in two ways:

- Firstly, the position of the mediator as “neutral” perpetuates a culture in which individuals are expected to educate others about their experiences. This expectation that oppressed groups must educate on anything but their own terms is itself a form of oppression. (As such, the position is far from neutral.)
- Secondly, the aim to find a solution “acceptable to everyone involved” suggests that compromises need to be made by both parties. The lives of people from oppressed groups should not be up for debate and compromise.

11. We have examples of students from oppressed groups teaching others on their own terms in initiatives such as “Take Pride in UBU Sport”, and LGBT+ Society’s Trans Awareness and Asexual Awareness weeks. (<http://www.ubu.org.uk/activities/sports/takepride/>)

Purpose:

1. We should be empowering students in oppressed groups to teach others about their experiences on their own terms, not forcing them to do so at a time which suits their oppressors or a supposedly “neutral” party.
2. We should be backing up people speaking out against discrimination, not asking them to compromise.
3. We should be pushing for disciplinary responses which address the roots of problems – here, systematic oppressions - not just punishing the symptoms.

Action:

1. In their involvement in redrafting the Student Policy on Bullying and Harassment, so that we don’t perpetuate a culture in which oppressed people are pressured to educate others, UBU should press for provision of advocates, not just “neutral” mediators.
2. UBU should look into expanding their services to include this advocacy role in responses to specific acts of oppressive bullying and harassment.
3. UBU should press for more “reparative” disciplinary responses which address the systematic oppressions at the root of much bullying and harassment. This could, for instance, be achieved by mandating a perpetrator to show a commitment to learning more about the experiences of oppressed groups by attending sessions such as those organised as part of Take Pride in Sport.
4. In an attempt to curb oppressive acts before the fact, UBU should ensure wide and varied publicity of events such as Trans Awareness week, and other educational events



about the experiences of oppressed groups, run by people from those groups at a time and place of their own choosing – i.e. on their own terms.

5. UBU should ensure that the previous action points are undertaken in such a way as to reached students in private housing, as well as those in halls accommodation.

Proposed by:

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