

Revolutionising the network: how can we build a mass student movement?

Aims of the session

To get grassroots input and ideas from P&P-ers to help us to confront one of the biggest challenges campaigning faces today: lack of diversity.

Overview of the session

- The participants were split into small groups and asked to discuss the question: What is diversity?
- The Small groups then fed back to everyone.
- All participants listened to some facts about diversity
- News headlines related to diversity were read out.
- Large group discussion on why is diversity important to campaigning?
- Participants were split into the same groups again and were asked the question: What are the Barriers to participation in campaigning?
- Each small group fed back their ideas on the barriers.
- The whole group then listened to a summary of the new Further Education/ Higher Education team's work, which is working to increase the diversity of the P&P network.
- In small groups participants then discussed how diversity could be increased in their P&P groups. These ideas will then feed into an on-line resource for groups.
- The small groups were then asked to write their comments and thought on the idea of 'diversity volunteers' who would spearhead increasing diversity across the network or in a particular region.

Key Outcomes (decisions/ recommendations)

Overall the group seemed positive about the idea of diversity reps. Diversity reps will now be recruited in June 2009 for a pilot year of Sept 09-Sept 10.

The recommendations from the participants discussing how to increase diversity within individual P&P groups will feed into an on-line resource. This resource will be used by P&P groups who want to increase the diversity of their groups.

Next steps (who is going to do what about the outcomes by when)

Ellie and Emma from the Further Education/Higher Education team are going to work with Lucy from the Universities team to create a job description, recruit for and train the new diversity reps.

The on-line resource will be put on the website under 'Universities,' ' Help and advice' and 'Sixth forms' 'Help and advice' by Mid May 2009.

How can people get involved?

We want to hear from you. If you want to volunteer as a diversity rep, add advice to the on-line resource or simply find out more e-mail

Agenda:

- What is diversity?
- Why is diversity important?
- Barriers to participation
- What is P&P doing?
- Increasing diversity in your groups
- Diversity champions

Network responses to the question: What is diversity?

1) Being inclusive

- Of people
- not making exclusionary statements
- not just taking the majority view
- respecting minorities

Including all relevant options

In P&P – the majority – white

- middle– class
- sometimes gender
- ideology
- mature students
- nurses/medics
- teachers
- types of campaigns

Variety

People
Anything
Ideas

Common groups its an issue for

ideology
age
sex
race & nationality
sexuality
class
language
religion
disability
politics
educational level

2) Different types of people

gender, especially leadership
ethnicity
class- WASP
political diversity can lead to friction
age (mature students)

geographical @ MC level- Wales, Scotland

3) Class, gender, lifestyles, race, religion, nationality, ideology politics

Pursuing diversity= variety- inclusive

Not always minorities, geographical diversity, diversity should include a variety,
problem of how to reach out to non-included/involved societal groups

4) Able bodied/disabled, subjects, age, ideologies, interests, different social/economic
backgrounds, gender, religion, multiracial, life experiences, multinational,
multicultural, sexuality

5) Being democratic, international diversity, people who have children, class variety,
people who work, ethnic diversity, accessibility, cultural, lifestyles, more ages
represented, variety, representative of agendas, student carers, religious variety,
varied approaches, LGBT diversity

Problems with media stereotyping- why is diversity important to campaigning?

Media tends to focus on a very narrow image of protesters and activists, such as:
middle classes
student
white

Could be manipulation by the media to poorly illustrate the strength in the movements
people reading media might be put off

But

Recent student occupations yielded wide ranging diversity and so perhaps argument need to be more accessible? Do we need to reframe?

Network responses to the question – What are the barriers to campaigning people may face?

- 1) Misconception
priorities
Apathy
Stigma 'Hippy'
Economic background
feeling dis-empowered about impact of campaigning
people are not aware of the alternatives
- 2) Apathy
Prejudices for ignorance in current campaigns
dis empowered- a thought of irrelevancy
stereotyping- disabilities, hippies, wealth
economic- costly
- 3) people feeling dis empowered,
apathy
people are not always aware of alternatives
priorities
economic
time
worried of trouble with authorities (for overseas students)
time
commitments- personal
prejudices
lack of experiences and confidence
- 4) cars- sign of social status, economic background means they worked hard for it
and don't want it taken away
don't have public transport
Never been on a train: Confidence lacking, money & class- train is too expensive,
not mobile
In an ideological minority, feel dis empowered, confidence lack
Lack of resources
Time, lacking, people have to work for money, careers, mindset- apathy,
negativity
- 5) campaigners have an image of self-righteousness and self sacrifice
defensiveness
cost
lack of support
lack of experience
group image
Being an individual – counter cultural

Network responses on how to increase the diversity of P&P groups

1) Don't have to be radical- easy way in-- different roles – supportive and behind the scenes

Not putting too much pressure on people to do everything, its OK to miss stuff-- don't single people out for one specific element of their identity

Be flexible- time- day? Evening?

– attendance (e.g. bring children)

Wide range of campaigns focused on

Don't have to immediately change your lifestyle to join

Think about how groups action can alienate people – workers likely to be people from lower socio-economic background

2) Pro actively try to involve people

diversity of actions- tactics/targets

diversity of communication methods

personal relationships

3) We don't think we can! (bias in student body) – wider socio-economic issues

Make effort to engage isolated individuals-- build a team feeling (speed freinding)

Using inclusive language, explaining backgrounds to groups and issues

being aware of presentations – presenting a diverse image at recruitment events

How do we challenge stereotypes?

4) One off events, no pressure to come back, planting a seed, get ideas out to people, chance for people to have completely different experiences

Ethical careers, ethical volunteering

tap into paid work- which do people need to do already

give people CV points

bottom up

5) Alcohol at network events (avoid normalisation)

emphasize accessibility in publicity

making it easier for 6th forms

making issues and tactics relevant to particular groups (esp. under -represented)

How can established groups help FE/HE content?

Networks response to the idea of Diversity reps

1) Temporary measure with overall aim of making diversity the norm and not something which people have to think about as an extra

Aim- national, but one volunteer per region

v different groups of people in different regions

to build personal relationships with groups- good to have regional volunteers

Target specific groups?

NOT people but groups

give information to diverse groups- not just the usual suspects

2) Support and training

need open minded and sensitive people

someone who doesn't see just the diverse aspect of someone's identity

communication skills and mediation skills

Awareness of barriers like activity with case studies from this session

3) Probably geographically specific
learn from other campaigns e.g. NUS on Black students campaign'
Hopefully diverse champions will be self selecting

AIM

more representative groups
people feeling comfortable
but avoid tokenism
keeping campaigning as a priority

4)Aims

work with diversity officers at universities
diversity audits – is P&P representative
cultural awareness training- understanding religions etc.
Regional focus-- diversity difference in regions – get different perspectives
national meetings incorporate training (3 per year)
Link people with cultural heritage through campaigning-- campaigns that could have
different regional emphasis e.g. TEP