



# Liberal Youth Communications

Prepared for: Liberal Youth Executive  
Prepared by: Bobby Dean (Communications Officer)

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Contact:  
[communications@liberalyouth.org](mailto:communications@liberalyouth.org)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Purpose

The purpose of this report is three-fold. Firstly it is to outline the current state of Liberal Youth's communication structures. This will inform the second purpose - to map out a way forward for the forthcoming year and set various goals accordingly. Finally it is to express an opinion on the way Liberal Youth functions as a whole. This report intends to integrate this final point throughout the report from the perspective of the Communications Officer

## Context

A new Liberal Youth executive took office as of July 1st 2011. As part of the drive towards the professionalisation of the organisation, mandated by the new Chair and Vice Chair's joint manifesto, each portfolio holder was requested to draw up a report in time for the next executive meeting outlining the intended future state of his or her remit. This report deadline was brought forward to mid-August by the Chair.

## Key Findings

- The inherited Liberal Youth website was not fit for purpose and must be transformed into a tool that utilises its great potential
- There is no clearly accessible platform for Liberal Youth members to speak to the Executive throughout the year, other than Conference and Activate
- Many Liberal Democrat members of an eligible age for Liberal Youth lack an understanding of who Liberal Youth are or motivation for getting involved
- Liberal Youth events are attended poorly with many members claiming they were not aware of particular events, such as Conference, and when they were aware it was often too late
- Internally, the organisation relies heavily on email as its central tool of communication
- A portfolio-orientated Executive has given encouragement to a silo philosophy, with many Executive members failing to recognise the inextricable interconnectivity of all of the Executive's briefs
- Branch/State to Federal relationships are inadequate with little or no formalised communication in place
- The process for all member mailings is crippling the organisation's ability to speak to its members
- Liberal Youth have next to no solid media contacts

## Recommendations

- The Liberal Youth main site needs to be overhauled in both style, content and design
- The embryonic Libertine should be relaunched with a proper amount of planning and thought put into how to build that initial momentum needed to get it off the ground
- An audit of the understanding of what and who Liberal Youth are should be carried out by the Executive to inform a renewed strategic direction for the organisation
- Conference, and other national events, must be advertised early, repeatedly and comprehensively
- A conscious effort must be made towards communicating with other members of the Executive beyond email and other online communications
- A written note of consideration to all the relevant Executive members must be made before undertaking any significant activity related to Liberal Youth
- A formalised communication structure should be developed alongside the Vice Chair and State Convenors
- Meetings with Liberal Democrat HQ to be arranged to resolve the continuing crisis surrounding external communications relating to membership data access
- Exploit all opportunities to gain media contacts, encourage/guide branches to do the same

# CURRENT CONDITION

The following sub-sections cover the various areas relating to the communications brief and the issues I have encountered since entering office or was aware of before I entered office.

## **Website**

As I understand it, the Liberal Youth main site at ([www.liberalyouth.org](http://www.liberalyouth.org)) that I inherited was a temporary, make-shift site. This was owing to an administrative error a while back that resulted in the loss of the previously more sophisticated site.

For an organisation like Liberal Youth, one that is lightly resourced but geographically vast, an effective web presence is not only desirable but essential. For a youth organisation this significance can be doubled again. It is often the first impression new members have of Liberal Youth and first impressions count. It has the potential to be the hub of the organization – a tool for the organization to speak to others and a resource for others to utilize. At the beginning of my term it was not fulfilling this potential.

## **Members having their say**

There are very limited opportunities for the membership to have their say and express their views to the Executive or wider membership. Formally there is Conference (bi-annually) but the membership need more opportunities if they are to be engaged enough to attend such an event in the first place.

An online platform is commonplace in most organizations, providing a place for communities to congregate and express their opinions. Liberal Youth do not have one. The Libertine is it in theory but at the time of writing this is embryonic at best.

## **Who are we**

The Communications officer cannot do his/her job unless there is a clear definition of what the organization is and does.

Liberal Youth outlines who and what it is in its constitution. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Executive has mixed and sometimes conflicting ideas about this. Further anecdotal evidence suggests the membership has a distinct lack of understanding of any outline at all.

In my encounters with people of an eligible age for Liberal Youth I have been met with a lack of enthusiasm for or, worse, outright derision towards the organization. The question most are essentially asking themselves and us is “Why should I get involved with Liberal Youth?” – A robust answer to this question is currently lacking.

## **Events Communications**

National events are attended poorly by the membership. Although technically within the remit of Events Officer, there is clear overlap here when it comes to promotion (to which I shall touch on further below). The communication to the membership of the last conference was unconstitutionally late. Although effective promotion alone cannot force attendance upwards, it can do a great deal towards aiding it and promotion has not been effective enough to date.

## **Communication between the Executive**

Google Apps is a fantastic tool for the Executive to utilize. The services it provides are rightly used to good effect by Liberal Youth. It goes without saying that email is equally as productive as an online tool – but it can be overused. I have come across painful attempts at decision-making through lengthy email exchanges. The propensity for decisions to be delayed or actions to be forgotten about also increases as items lay dormant in inboxes for weeks. Although email is essential, it must not be seen as the exclusive tool of communication between the Executive.

## **Silo philosophy**

Liberal Youth has a portfolio-style Executive system. This has many advantages but one disadvantage is the tendency for Executive members to adopt a silo philosophy. This essentially means the failure of portfolio-holders to recognize the interconnectivity of their respective activities. One example is touched upon above, where Communications and Events need to be working much more closely together in order to formulate and deliver an effective promotional campaign.

## **Branches/State relations with Exec**

The Regional Branches are still establishing themselves and in some cases still materializing. It is understandable that there are little or no formal communication structures in place at this stage but it is important that these are established sooner rather than later. As I understand it, this system was partly introduced so that there was better co-ordination between the national and local activity – this will not occur without established communication structures.

## **AMEs**

It has more recently come to my attention that the procedure for sending out All Member Emails is farcical. Having drafted an AME weeks in advance of a settled send-out date (first week of August) it is yet, to my knowledge, to be sent out. This is owing to a drawn out, detached process for distributing the AME relating to access to membership data. Liberal Youth are open to criticism about failures to keep the membership informed of its activities if it cannot send out a simple email.

## **Media Contacts**

The organization has no known, solid media contacts. The press release procedure is therefore handicapped by this lack of contacts.

# FUTURE PLAN

The following section will run through a list of recommendations based upon the findings above with related action points, target dates for completion and support needed to complete each point. As many recommendations are already being undertaken, progress is reported where appropriate.

## Website

- *Recommendation:* The Liberal Youth main site needs to be overhauled in both style, content and design
- *Action points:* Plan, design and build content for various sections of sites
- *Support:* Charlotte Henry; Regional Chairs; State Convenors; Sarah Harding; Robson Brown
- *Timetable:* Establish base structure and redesign ASAP. Complete before Freshers 2011
- *Progress:* The basic design is in place. Charlotte Henry has returned from holiday this week and should now be on hand to make any further adjustments. A branches section is being built in conjunction with the regional chairs and state convenors. A policy section is planned to be built in conjunction with Sarah Harding within a wider Resources section to be aided by Robson Brown

## Members having their say

- *Recommendation:* The embryonic Libertine should be relaunched with a proper amount of planning and thought put into how to build that initial momentum needed to get it off the ground
- *Action points:* Build a blogroll of potential contributors; plan a launch timetable to build momentum
- *Support:* Charlotte Henry
- *Timetable:* By Freshers 2011
- *Progress:* Limited. Small blogroll being built but further help needed to discover bloggers – raise with Helen Duffet in forthcoming meeting.

## Who are we

- *Recommendation:* An audit of the understanding of what and who Liberal Youth are should be carried out by the Executive to inform a renewed strategic direction for the organization
- *Action points:* Retrieve Executive's opinions on organisation; collate and identify common ground and conflict points to resolve
- *Support:* None except contributions
- *Timetable:* ASAP – before next Exec meeting at latest
- *Progress:* Opinions retrieved and collated. Common ground identified, conflict points remain unresolved. Report to be drawn up in time for next Exec meeting.

## **Events Communications**

- *Recommendation:* Conference, and other national events, must be advertised early, repeatedly and comprehensively.
- *Action points:* At least three AMEs regarding Conference. Dedicated functional and informative web page. Consistent social media promotion. Instructions to Exec of responsibility to promote.
- *Support:* Thomas Hemsley; Executive
- *Timetable:* First AME by mid-Aug. Second in interim, third on eve of Conference /Ongoing.
- *Progress:* Web page built. Social media needs upping a gear. Instructions to exec need to be made

## **Communication between the Executive**

- *Recommendation:* A conscious effort must be made towards communicating with other members of the Executive beyond email and other online communications
- *Action points:* Good practice guide on when email is and isn't appropriate. Encourage Exec members to phone and meet in person wherever possible
- *Support:* None
- *Timetable:* On-going. Good practice guide by next Exec meeting
- *Progress:* Encouraged use of phone when occasion has arisen

## **Silo philosophy**

- *Recommendation:* A written consideration of all the relevant Executive members must be made before undertaking any significant activity related to Liberal Youth
- *Action points:* Request Chair looks into formalizing interconnectivity of particular briefs
- *Support:* Tom Wood
- *Timetable:* January 2012
- *Progress:* None

## **Branches/State relations with Exec**

- *Recommendation:* A formalised communication structure to be developed alongside the Vice Chair and State Convenors
- *Action points:* Map out both ideal and realistic structures. Trial and error approach to methods
- *Support:* Charlotte Henry; State Convenors
- *Timetable:* End of term of office
- *Progress:* None to date

## **AMEs**

- *Recommendation:* Meetings with Liberal Democrat HQ to be arranged
- *Action points:* Organise meeting with LDHQ
- *Support:* None.
- *Timetable:* As soon as possible
- *Progress:* None to date, several meetings postponed

## **Media contacts**

- *Recommendation:* Exploit all opportunities to gain media contacts, encourage/guide branches to do the same
- *Action points:* When media requests come in deliver on them efficiently and courteously. Be pro-active in building relationships with journalists and treat it as a relationship not a transaction. Create guide / provide templates to assist branches in local media relations
- *Support:* Regional Chairs; Convenors; Admin; Chair
- *Timetable:* On going / End of term of office
- *Progress:* Two efficient deliveries of media requests: one resulting in a piece in page 6 of The Guardian, another resulting in a feature in The Observer (to be printed late August)