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BRANCH DEVELOPMENT
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BRANCH DEVELOPMENT GUIDE



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Foreword and introduction

This guide will provide a basic overview of how to found a new Young Liberals branch in your local area from scratch. This guide is not exhaustive but serves as a basic ideas and framework, detailed local knowledge should be sought for region specific issues.

If you have any questions, please get in touch with the Branch Development Officer(s): <https://www.youngliberals.uk/exec>

Text only version available upon request.

Setting up your branch

Useful Contact Information State and Regional Young Liberals

Wherever you are in the country, there will be a relevant Young Liberals organisation to contact and help get you started.

If you live in England, there are regional chairs for each region, whose details can be found here: <https://www.youngliberals.uk/england>

If you live in either Scotland or Wales, there are state executives, whose details can be found here:

<https://www.youngliberals.uk/scotland>

<https://www.youngliberals.uk/wales>

Finding members in your area

Lighthouse is a useful tool to find young members, many young members have a tag called Young Liberals which means you can filter and find many of them. However, not all young members have the correct tagging on the membership database. The quickest and easiest way is probably email, and phone call to reach out to members you have identified on top of a local party wide email. An additional difficulty may arise from that many people have not changed their address when moving to their university. This is a difficulty that we are not able to circumvent at the moment, however as your branch grows and gains more presence in the area. Many young members might find out about you and decide to join. Knowing where your more active members are will likely inform what area your area based branch will need to cover to have enough members in your branch. There's no hard rule about exactly what sort of area is appropriate for an area based branch to cover.

For university based branches, the easiest way to find like-minded people to join your new branch is to use Freshers' Fair. The local party and the Young Liberal branch development fund are both potential sources of funding to pay for fees incurred by attending Freshers' Fair. Otherwise, Young Liberals do have a communication request form set up by the Communications Officer to broadcast your message to the wider membership.

Setting Up Your Branch

Lighthouse is a useful tool to find young members, many young members have a tag called Young Liberals which means you can filter and find many of them. However, not all young members have the correct tagging on the membership database. The quickest and easiest way is probably email, and phone call to reach out to members you have identified on top of a local party wide email.

Now you have a small group of motivated young people (around 3 people is usually the minimum to get it going) who agree to form an executive committee for this nascent branch. It's time to have an annual general meeting (AGM) and agree on a constitution. For university branches, your student union usually has some requirements on what your constitution will need to look like. Having the first AGM and adopting a constitution is not a requirement to be accredited if you are an area based branch instead of university based one. Getting your initially small group of dedicated members meeting together to go out canvassing, hosting socials, and delivering can make a huge difference already. Your regional chair, and the Young Liberals Elections officer are more than happy to help advertise action days you could run with your local party to attract more people to come along.

For university based branches, there are often requirements set by the student union or the university regarding how societies can be founded. Please consult their rules and regulations for the specifics.

If they require you to have a certain number of members to allow your society to be registered or maintain registration. Asking your friends to put their name down as a way to bump up the total number of members to achieve registration so you can attract more members has been a tried and tested method. Advertising around the campus in permitted ways allowed by the university can also be helpful to get enough members.

Under 18 members

It's not unusual to have younger members joining your branch or your local party eager to get involved. Attention is needed with regards to safeguarding, your local party often will have a designated safeguarding lead. The Young Liberals designated safeguarding lead can also be contacted for advice.

<https://www.youngliberals.uk/safeguarding> Three common things to keep in mind is that parental consent is often needed for under 18 members to participate in things like canvassing and delivering due to the nature of the activity they; contact information of under 18 members need to be handled sensitively, and if you are heading to a pub after your action day this might not be the most inclusive space for underage members. For the party's safeguarding policy and code of conduct on working with under 18's follow this link.

<https://www.libdems.org.uk/safeguarding> It is your responsibility to read and follow the policy set out.

Another important distinction to keep in mind is that most under 18 members do not attend university, so methods that work for university/further education students may not work for under 18 members. It may be possible to send your councillors to school to talk about what their job is like and how they work to students studying politics if there's an interest, some schools may even allow political societies to be set up. Word of mouth and social media presence is usually the main driver of engaging and recruiting under 18 members.

Accreditation

Accreditation is the scheme through which the Young Liberals formally recognise and support active branches and societies; being accredited means that your branch is officially affiliated with the Young Liberals.

You probably know whether your branch is accredited or not, but if you are unsure, feel free to check with the Branch Development Officer(s)

There are lots of benefits and no drawbacks to accreditation - it's free! Here are some of the benefits the Young Liberals can offer you if your branch is accredited.

Access to Young Liberal's Canva Pro account

All accredited branches can apply to gain access to YL's Canva Pro account.

Access to social media graphics, tips and templates for promoting your branch

We have a wealth of social media graphics and resources for you to use. These can be found at: bit.ly/YLCommsResources Newer graphics exist on the Young Liberals Canva Pro account which you can gain access to by filling out the Google form under the about us -resources tab of the Young Liberals website.

Accreditation

Promotion of your events/ social media content to the rest of the Young Liberals' membership

Comms request form is also hosted under the resources tab, which you can request Young Liberals to push your content via our official channels. This can be an additional way for your branch to reach more members that are yet to know you exist on their campus.

Discounts for Freshers' packs including literature and freebies

Every September, the Young Liberals provide packs for freshers' events across the country. They include literature and freebies to give out at your stall. Accredited branches are offered a discount on these packs!

Promotion on the Young Liberals' website and social media

The Young Liberals will be able to signpost people looking to join their local branch towards your branch, as well as supporting your branch on social media; we maintain an up-to-date list of accredited branches for (potential) members to browse here: <https://www.youngliberals.uk/get-involved/branches-and-societies>

Accreditation

Access to the Branch Development Fund to help fund events

The Branch Development Fund is a pot of money available to accredited YL branches and societies, which you can apply for. You might apply for this for all sorts of reasons: maybe you want to provide food or drink for a social event, or you want to print leaflets for a campaign on campus. You can find more on the [Branch Development Fund page](#) here.

Unfortunately, some Students' Unions don't allow societies to take money from political organisations, something you will need to consider if you're a university society affiliated with a Students' Union. We recommend that you check with them if you're unsure!

Freshers

Choose issues that are going to attract new members

You might be really enthusiastic about devolution or tax reform, but don't assume everyone is. Shout about the Liberal Democrats' / Young Liberals' exciting policies, such as legalising cannabis, taking action on the climate crisis, building more houses, and standing up for trans rights. It's especially useful if you can give away stickers or small merch items that highlight these - check out the YL packs for freshers' events (discounted for accredited branches!) for some examples of these.

Emphasise the 'liberal', not just the 'Lib Dem'

Don't feel restricted to talking about your branch / society as a place for Lib Dems - lots of young people might not (yet!) identify as Liberal Democrats, but might still feel a real affinity for liberal issues and ideas. Some branches prefer to use the name 'X Young Liberals' or 'X Liberal Association' to help make clear to students that they're broad churches, which anyone can be interested in and join.

Draw people in with an interesting question

Get people over to your stand with an interesting question, and maybe even have a sticker/whiteboard poll, where people can visually mark what policy ideas they support with coloured dots or marks. Pay particular attention to how you can choose issues that might be interesting to women and any other groups who might be underrepresented in your branch and/or youth politics as a whole. Once they've voted, be sure to tell them about the Lib Dems' / Young Liberals' ideas that they agree with and encourage them to sign up to membership of your branch!

Freshers

Sweets

Having a box of sweets on your stall can be an easy way to draw in new students who are just browsing around a freshers' fair. You can use the opportunity of them taking a sweet to chat with them about your branch. Lemon sherbet has been my favourite to give out at Freshers' Fair due to its close resemblance of the party colour, but you are welcome to use other sweets.

Your first event and term cards

By freshers' fair, make sure that your first event is planned so you can tell people who come over to your stall about what you're running and when. If you can, give them a card with the date/time, location and activity of your first event, and - if you're able to plan the whole term in advance - have a term card of events that you can hand out!

Take breaks

Draw up a rota for your committee of who's going to sit on your freshers' stall at which times. It can be exhausting to run the stall all day, so make sure your committee members are taking breaks when they need them!

Freshers

Freshers' guide

Leaving home to go to university can be a very daunting experience for many people. If you have the time, "A Liberal Guide to [City/Uni name]" would be a good way to help new students out as well as push your society's name recognition out there. Useful information like where are the good student night outs, stay safe in the city, how to get help/ support for mental health, any quirks of the university that new students might not be aware of, any fun traditions that would be helpful to know. Most importantly, don't forget to attach your term card in the guide as well, let people know all the fun and exciting events that will take place.

Running events

Event Ideas

Spirited Discussions

One of the most popular events for Young Liberals branches is Spirited Discussions, an evening of debate and drinks (whether they're alcoholic or not!).

Pick a few motions to debate and a chair, and after the discussion have a vote on whether you agree or not! Motions can be as serious or silly as you like - maybe you want to discuss housebuilding in your local area, or maybe you want to debate whether pineapple belongs on pizza.

Key things to think about when organising this event

1. Venue - If you can, we suggest booking/hiring a room on your campus for this event, or asking your local party about a good place to hold it in your local area.
2. Motions - make these something everyone can get involved in. They shouldn't be too niche or technical, or require extensive background knowledge. (If debating the motion needs everyone to know the ins and outs of the 2010-15 Coalition, you've probably gone too specific!) Really consider how your motions can be interesting to a broad range of people - consider what might be topical, or interesting to groups that attend your events in smaller numbers.

Running events

3. Inclusion – make sure the event always has non-alcoholic drinks and snacks so that people who don't drink can still participate fully. Try to also keep an eye out as a committee for new attendees (making sure they have someone to chat to during breaks, etc) and check in with anyone who seems like they might be over-indulging.
4. You can also do collaborations with other political, debating societies on campus. Certain times of the year or topics can be especially relevant for collaboration with societies representing marginalised communities. Be careful which society you collaborate with, bear in mind any potential bad optics, reputational damages collaborations could bring. When run successfully, these collaboration events can be extremely beneficial.

List of spirited discussion motions that other branches found to work well

1. This house would ban TikTok
2. This house would abolish the monarchy
3. This house would give direct cash transfer as foreign aid
4. This house believes that Liberalism is dead
5. This house would work towards a world government
6. This house believes the House of Lords should be fully elected
7. This house would abolish private school
8. This house believes democracy is more important than liberalism
9. This house believes meritocracy is a myth
10. This house would go into a coalition with Labour
11. This house believes British society is too individualistic
12. This house regrets rainbow capitalism
13. This house regrets fast fashion
14. This house believes Liberalism is the future
15. This house believes Liberalism is compatible with Socialism
16. This house fears AI
17. This house regrets dating app
18. This house believes the ends justify the means
19. This house believes that local councils should be run by independents and not political parties
20. This house would legalise all drugs
21. This house would ban single sex schools
22. This house would abolish borders
23. This house prefers parliamentary democracy to presidential democracy
24. This house believes in Universal Basic Income
25. This house would sacrifice the few for the many

Running events

Reading groups

Nothing better than making other people do your politics paper reading with you than making everyone discuss it at your reading group. Whether this is one of the federalist papers, liberal feminism, or anything that can be related to liberalism, put it in your term card. Ideally the text should be short enough for people to read beforehand, have a committee member/ volunteer to have read it and generate some points, criticism, and remarks that can be used at the start of the session to generate discussions. It's also helpful to provide context to the reading material if you can, especially if it's on a topic that most people do not find familiar.

Speaker events

Speaker events are a nice addition to have in your term card. High profile speakers are likely to attract more audiences that could be interested in what they have to say. Collaborations with relevant subject societies (e.g. international development, geography soc when a speaker comes to talk about international aid). To source a good speaker, your local party, regional chair and some internet searching will go a long way. Most importantly, the speakers you invite do not have to be a LibDem party member, they could be liberals in general that hold liberal positions on a range of issues that do align with our liberal beliefs.

Running events

Informal events

Now you have some more formal events on your term card, maybe you would consider adding more informal events. Charity pub quiz, pub crawl, pancake day event are all good ways to make your packed term cards more approachable and cater to a greater variety of audiences.

Things to remember

1. Be approachable, it's difficult to go to a society's event and meet new people. Make sure your committee spot newcomers and talk to them making sure they are comfortable, be the friendly face at all your events and make every endeavour to ensure that newcomers are able to get involved in whatever activities are happening.
2. Prioritise newcomers to speak in a debate at your spirited discussion, and give them a round of applause for deciding to make their first speech.
3. Do post pictures of your events on your social media to show (hopefully) everyone had a great time there.
4. Think about accessibility, how can your events be accessible to as many people as possible.

Running events

Campaigning

Get in contact with your local party about campaigning in your local area. They might want to offer your branch members Focus leaflet delivery rounds, and they may have campaigning sessions already organised in your local area that you can advertise and attend as a branch. It's always a good idea to have socials organised directly after campaigning to give people something to look forward to if it gets tiring.

Things to remember

1. You can advertise and attend campaigning that's already being organised by your local party! It can be a great way to meet new people from your local community
2. Getting regional and/or national YL to advertise your campaigning event

Recruiting the next committee

Now you had a term or two of great events. You need to pencil in your annual general meeting (AGM) to elect the next set of committee members. How could you go about finding people to stand for committee?

1. Start early, identify people who come to your event frequently and suggest to them about running for committee.
2. Survey your existing committee to find out who is intending to stay and carry on for another year, so you know which gap you need to fill.
3. Co-opt people into deputy roles to give them experience and confidence to run as a full committee member when the AGM comes about.
4. Each committee member should be expected to find their successor(s), make sure they are thinking about finding the next generation of committee members for their role from day 1.
5. Host a social event before the AGM to allow people to meet the current office holders, give advice, and persuade people to run if they are still deciding.
6. Have the current outgoing officers directly contacting people who expressed interest in running to encourage people running, give advice, and answer questions.
7. Finding out from regional chairs if any young liberal members are coming to your university and reach out to them.
8. Encourage people from diverse backgrounds to run for your committee.



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Branch Development Guide