# Bristol Becoming the UK Capital of Civil Rights

**Wednesday 29 April, 2026**

**For immediate release:**

BRISTOL, UK — On the anniversary of the Bristol Bus Boycott, Bristol has today set out plans to become the UK Capital of Civil Rights by 2029—positioning the city as a national testbed for tackling inequality.

As one of the first steps toward this vision, ActiFest launches as a new Civic Lab—inviting the city to shape what a Civil Rights Capital can be.

Led by grassroots movement Curiosity UnLtd alongside a consortium of partners, the initiative marks the beginning of a multi-year effort to break the link between background and life chances—and to develop a model that could be adopted by cities across the UK.

“Activism—from the 1831 riots and the 1963 Bus Boycott to the toppling of Colston’s statue—has always been the lifeblood systemic change in this city,” Julz, Disruptor-in-Chief at Curiosity UnLtd, sets out. “In this spirit, we are launching ActiFest as the catalyst for our 2029 ambition. We’re beginning by shaping a Civil Rights Manifesto — created by, for and with the people — to turn our civil?rights legacy into civic action and build a model any UK city can use.”

**From Legacy to Laboratory**

A Civil Rights Capital is a city that builds the civic, cultural and institutional systems required to defend and advance rights visibly, measurably and at scale.

Bristol’s announcement comes on the anniversary of the Bristol Bus Boycott—a turning point that helped reshape British society and paved the way for the Race Relations Act.

It also aligns with a new national moment: the forthcoming Race Equality and Disability Act, shaped by the government’s detailed response to public consultation—signalling renewed focus on tackling structural inequality across the UK.

A University of Bristol alumnus and the UK’s first Black Cabinet Minister, The Rt Hon Lord Paul Boateng CVO, reflected: “Bristol’s long tradition of activism—from abolition to the Bus Boycott—shows why it matters now. At a time when civil rights are under pressure globally, cities like Bristol must lead with courage and example.”

Bristol helped shape the last civil rights era. Today, it steps forward again.

The ambition is grounded in a stark reality. In the same week as Paul Stephenson OBE’s birthday, and nearly a decade after the Runnymede Trust highlighted the scale of racial inequality in the city, Bristol continues to face deep structural disparities.

Analysis of major employers and anchor institutions in Bristol indicates an ethnicity pay gap of up to 24.1%—significantly above the national average of 19.1%.

As Bristol sets out to become the UK Capital of Civil Rights, Steven Bluff, Chief Operating Officer at Bristol Business Improvement District, observed: “As a force for good, business has a vital role in making Bristol’s growth truly inclusive. ActiFest gives organisations a framework to turn intent into measurable outcomes—and build a stronger, more competitive city for all.”

**ActiFest: 121 Days of Civic Action**

Running from 29 April to 28 August, ActiFest transforms Bristol into a citywide platform for participation. The 121-day programme mirrors the timeline of the 1963 Boycott—from its beginning to its victory—and culminates on the anniversary of both that success and the I Have a Dream speech.

The programme includes:

- Immersive talks and public conversations
- Film screenings and exhibitions

## Media:











## Related Sectors:

Charities & non-profits :: Education & Human Resources :: Entertainment & Arts :: Government :: Lifestyle & Relationships :: Public Sector & Legal ::

## Related Keywords:

Bristol Bus Boycott :: Paul Stephenson :: Civil Rights :: Race Relations Act :: Edward Colston :: Activism :: Ethnicity :: Race Equality & Disability Act :: Bristol ::

## Scan Me:

- Large-scale public art and performances

Many events are free and family-friendly, designed to widen access and participation across the city.

**Reclaiming the Streets: Artivism and Dancivism**

A defining feature of ActiFest is the reclaiming of public space as a site of civic participation and leadership.

Artivism, in collaboration with UpFest, will transform the city into a canvas. Emerging artist Ella-Mia Grant—creator of the St Pauls Carnival "UniCarni"—will lead an immersive workshop inviting the public to co-create a large-scale mural.

"This is our chance to show the next generation what a Civil Rights Capital looks like," added Grant.

Dancivism explores movement as resistance and resilience. Marking the 10th anniversary of her passing, Carmen Beckford MBE—Bristol's first Racial Equality Officer—will be honoured through the display of her sculpture on the RWA plinth during *Dance Out* (May 9 – August 9), highlighting dance as a platform for resistance resilience and repair.

**Windrush Week Highlight**

On June 27, the award-nominated production *Jamaica Love* arrives at Bristol Beacon during Windrush Week. Created by Mervyn Weir, the production marks the 78th anniversary of Windrush by weaving together British and Jamaican histories.

The work centres the stories of pioneers who arrived with "nothing but dignity and determination," placing their legacy at the heart of Bristol's cultural life.

**Play Your Part: Together for Bristol**

Bristol has never waited for permission to lead. From the Bus Boycott to the toppling of Colston's statue, the city has consistently shaped national change. Now, it is being called to lead again.

ActiFest is an open invitation to take part — helping to shape what becoming the UK's Civil Rights Capital looks like in practice.

**To become a UK Capital of Civil Rights, what is the one outcome you believe Bristol should be held accountable for delivering by 2029?**

Your response will help shape Bristol's first Civil Rights Manifesto — a public statement of priorities shaped by, for and with the people of this city.

Together for Bristol — share your view: https://forms.gle/NVVb9HAbiDidKiWt9 or visit CuriosityUnLtd.com

**Ends.**

**Notes to Editors**

Interviews with Ella-Mia Grant, Mervyn Weir and Julz Davis are available on request with programme leads and contributors.

**Curiosity UnLtd** is a Bristol-based organisation focused on racial and social justice, building on the legacy of the Bristol Bus Boycott 360 programme.

**ActiFest** is a 121-day Civic Lab and action-research programme running from 29 April to 28 August 2026, marking the timeline of the Boycott from its beginning to its victory.

The initiative forms part of Bristol's ambition to become the UK's first Civil Rights Capital by 2029.

The Civic Lab model brings together communities, institutions and policymakers to test and scale practical approaches to reducing inequality. A Civic Lab toolkit will be developed through ActiFest, capturing insights and approaches to support adoption by other UK cities.

Alongside this, the **Together for Bristol toolkit** provides organisations with a structured framework to participate—enabling partners across sectors to align activity, demonstrate commitment, and contribute to coordinated, citywide progress.

The programme is supported by a Strategic Cultural Development Producer, funded through Arts Council England, to align partners, evidence and investment.

The ethnicity pay gap figure referenced is based on analysis of major employers and anchor institutions in Bristol, alongside publicly available data including:

- Office for National Statistics
- Business in the Community
- Runnymede Trust
- Bristol City Council workforce data
- University of Bristol pay gap analysis

Research by Business in the Community indicates that closing ethnicity pay gaps and wider labour market disparities could unlock up to £37 billion annually for the UK economy.

A 2025 report commissioned by the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport recommended that the Bristol Bus Boycott be included in the national curriculum, reinforcing its ongoing national significance.

**Consortium and Partners**

The initiative is supported by a cross-sector consortium comprising cultural institutions, public bodies, community organisations, and national partners. The partnership reflects a coordinated, citywide approach to tackling inequality across culture, policy, education and employment.

This includes organisations such as:

- Bristol City Council
- West of England Combined Authority
- Arts Council England
- University of Bristol
- Black South West Network
- Unite the Union
- We The Curious
- City of Bristol College

**Toolkits**

- Download Together for Bristol toolkit here
- Access Count Me In: Bristol survey here

## Company Contact:

**Curiosity Consultancy Ltd**

T. 07719869562
E. julz@curiosityunltd.com
W. https://www.curiosityunltd.com/

**Additional Contact(s):**
julzd1971@gmail.com

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