Democracy review – proposal paper

April 2016

Background

In September 2015, Anglia Ruskin Students' Union approached NUS to support a review of its representative structures and consider possible alternatives and innovations to strengthen decision-making and democratic participation.

A workshop was facilitated on 15 October 2015 with key stakeholders to define the functions of democracy. The following were agreed:

1) Empower students to decide which ideas to enact to make change
2) Empower students to be critical and steer the actions of officers
3) Provide an accessible and inclusive space to have all voices heard
4) Be a rewarding experience that helps all students engage and influence beyond the university walls

A survey was launched on 19 October 2015 which ran to 6 November 2015 in order to understand preferences of the membership in relation to democracy and representation. There were a total of 824 responses in all, approximately 5.1% of the membership. NUS also interviewed each full-time officer, analysed the results of the survey and produced a report recommending the type of innovations that would suit the membership of Anglia Ruskin Students' Union. The report was received on 14 December 2015.

A workshop to translate the findings of the membership survey into coherent recommendations was facilitated on 15 December 2015. A further meeting to discuss the recommendations took place on 12 January 2016. The paper was considered and supported by the Executive Committee at their meeting on Thursday 7 April 2016.

"Your success is created by students"

In August 2015, Anglia Ruskin Students' Union also commissioned Red Brick Research to lead large-scale research to support the formulation of a new clear and bold brand and vision for the organisation's long term future. The project has allowed the union to gain a comprehensive and robust understanding of its membership, in turn helping to identify both opportunities and challenges that will inform the development of a new strategic plan.

A survey was launched in September 2015 which ran into October 2015. There were a total of 3,260 responses in all, approximately 20.1% of the membership.

Priorities

1) Representing students' interests: "We actively listen and respond to what students want and use their ideas to create positive changes which improve their university experience"
2) Student community
3) Student welfare
4) Academic advice/support

5) Careers and employability support

A Personal SU – the agreed direction of travel – will lead to "a hugely increased personal relevance to students by recognising and celebrating the diversity and ambition that exists" and it's important that the union's representative structures are developed to reflect such approach, the wider priorities of the membership and the organisation's long term vision.

Key figures to consider

- Only 41% surveyed agreed that the students' union effectively represents them and their views
- Only 53% surveyed agree that the students' union ensures that every student voice is heard

Results and recommendations

1) Full-time officer roles

The current full-time officer roles are President, Academic Officer, Communications Officer, Experience Officer (Cambridgeshire) and Experience Officer (Essex) with the latter four to be replaced with Education Officer, Welfare Officer, Activities Officer (Cambridgeshire) and Activities Officer (Essex) from July 2016.

NUS have made a recommendation to refocus the roles on representation – and outline a "key principle" approach.

Key figures to consider

- Only 25.7% surveyed felt they understood what all of the full-time officers do
- Only 51% surveyed agreed or strongly agreed they can hold the full-time officers to account
- 33.1% surveyed felt the current full-time officer roles were neither extremely effective or effective
- Experience Officer (Essex) and Experience Officer (Cambridgeshire) were considered to be the most administrative full-time roles
- 93.3% surveyed felt it either important or slightly important that the full-time officers' roles include responsibility for academic representation, 90.8% for communications, 90.3% for equality, 88.1% for wellbeing/welfare, 87% for disability liberation, 86.9% for campaigning
- 56.4% surveyed felt either very or slightly likely to share the same views as someone who shares their interests, 53.4% the same course, 46.8% the same level of study (see below)

(1) Someone who shares the same interests	(8) Someone with the same gender
(2) Someone who studies the same course	(9) Someone from the same country
(3) Someone doing the same level of study	(10) Someone with the same faith
(4) Someone with the same socio-economic status	(11) Someone who lives in the same place
(5) Someone with the same mode of study	(12) Someone who studies at the same campus
(6) Someone the same age	(13) Someone with the same heritage
(7) Someone who grew up in the same place	(14) Someone with the same ethnicity

Students' union recommendation: **'Multi-portfolio' new model**

President

To chair, lead and co-ordinate the Executive Committee, providing day-to-day guidance and support for each Executive Officer and championing accountability and communication

Vice President x4

To act as the lead representative for a constituency by, for example, interests, course, level of study

The role responsibilities to include (see below top twelve priority responsibilities for full-time officers):

(1) Academic representation	(6) Campaigning*
(2) Communications	(8) Employment
(3) Equality	(10) Democratic procedures
(4) Wellbeing/welfare	(11) Societies
(5) Disability, (7) black, (9), LGBT, (12) women's liberation	

*Local, national and international politics placed at (20), (21) and (24) respectively

See Appendix 1 for an example of a full role description of President and Vice President

Strengths

- Highly representative, over administrative
- Possible part-time role – current Faculty Rep role – to support each full-time officer taken up by either a UG or PG, the opposite of the incumbent of the full-time role
- Holistic approach bringing together curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular representation
- Encouraging joint working across the organisation, regular collaboration and communication

Weaknesses

- Broad in responsibility
- Possible duplication

2) Part-time officer roles and Executive Committee

Key figures to consider

- Only 29.6% surveyed wanted to take part in implementing a decision within the decision making process
- Only 17.8% surveyed wanted representatives to use their discretion to make decisions on their behalf and then tell them what they've done
- Only 31.8% wanted decisions to be made by electing students to decide on their behalf

- 58.2% felt democracy in the students' union should be control of the organisation by all of its members, compared to 34.8% who felt it should be control by a majority
- 68.2% surveyed felt it important that the full-time officers' roles include responsibility for disability liberation, 67.3% for women's liberation, 58.2% for black liberation, 55.6% for LGBT liberation
- This is compared to 35.6% for sport, 46.2% for community work and the environment, 45.2% for volunteering, 48.2% for societies

Students' union recommendation

Reduce the size of the Executive Committee to include only the full-time officers and a reduced number of part-time officers one for Cambridge campus and one for Chelmsford campus; with Peterborough campus to be discussed and developed further

Considerations

- The role of the Executive Committee is to be highly focused on the implementation of policy and campaigning work
- Chair of the Executive Committee to be the President
- Development of an accountability framework

3) Decision-making

Key figures to consider

- 67.2% surveyed wanted to take part in identifying issues to be addressed within the decision making process, 52.4% analysing different solutions and 48.1% deciding on which solution to implement

Identifying issues to be addressed (67.2%)

Analysing different solutions (52.4%)

Deciding on which solution to implement (48.1%)

Implementing the decision (29.6%)
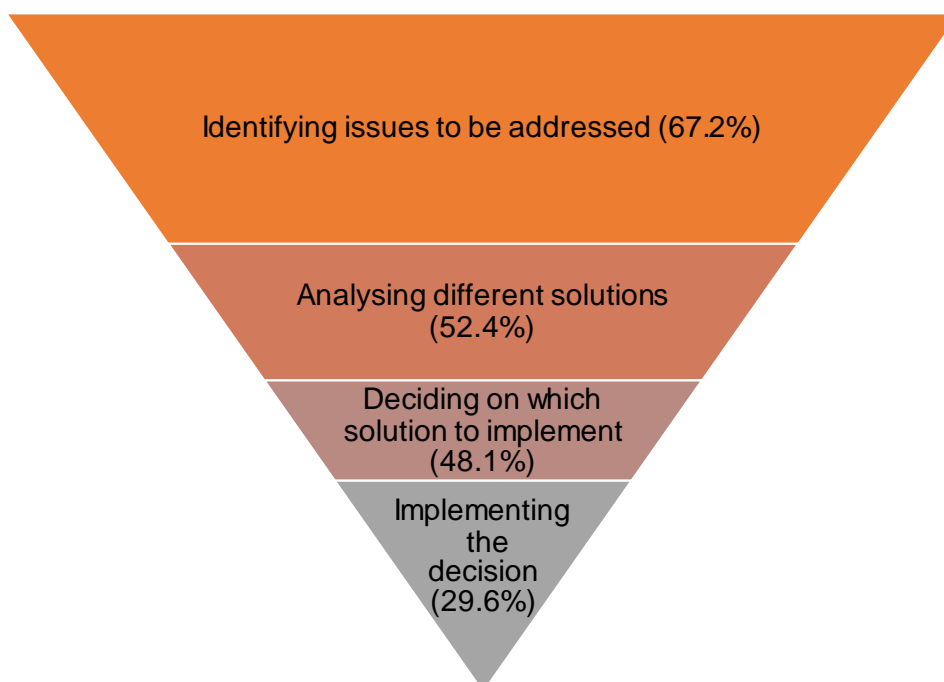
- 46.2% surveyed felt either not or not at all comfortable standing in an election in order to become an appointed decision maker, 28.6% being randomly selected/invited
- 48.6% surveyed felt they should be grouped according to common interest (what they do) when decisions are being made, 37.2% according to common perspective (how they think) and 12% common identity (who they are)
- 60.1% surveyed wanted to vote using an app to make a decision, 59.5% wanted big meetings open to all students, 56.2% campus wide ballots, 44.1% online discussion forums, 39.6% small meetings with specific responsibilities and interests
- 67.7% felt democracy in the students' union should attempt to negotiate mutual agreement amongst students using consensus

Students' union recommendation

Idea development

1) Students are able to submit ideas for consideration along with an online discussion forum
2) Students are able support an idea – the more supported, the higher the likelihood of it being discussed and/or taken forward
3) Ideas will be dealt with – either implemented, re-distributed, or taken to a group to discuss its implementation
4) Ideas can/will be implemented immediately by an elected representative or volunteer if minor and/or have no possible negative impact
5) Ideas heavily supported by 100+ ('big ideas') will be taken for discussion to a self-selected group with vested interest, chaired by a nominee of the Executive Committee
6) A preferendum approach by app and open to all could be used to deal with a particularly controversial issue/an issue that might have a negative impact outside of the self-selected group

Meeting

1) "All student meeting" in October and April/May
2) The role is to fulfil legislative requirements, agree policy, review the Article of Association and Bye-Laws, hold the Executive Committee accountable and monitor the impact and implementation of 'big ideas'
3) Voting open to all with a quoracy of 500

Other discussion

- Use of random selection (only 28.6% felt not or not at all comfortable, 48.6% standing in an election)

Considerations

- Frequency and cycle

- Resource required to effectively deliver a structure (including staffing and incentivisation)

4) Chair of "all student meeting"

- 51.1% surveyed felt either very or comfortable being interviewed for a position in order to become an appointed decision maker, 29.7% standing in an election

Students' union recommendation

Appoint, develop and train a voluntary Chair of the "all student meeting"

Considerations

- Resource required to effectively train and support (including staffing, pay and possibly cross-campus travel)

5) Political education

NUS recommendation

The union also need to nurture efficacy and political imagination. Perry Walker has developed "Open Up" see http://openupuk.org/ and one physical called "Talk Shop" designed to help people better understand public policy. A programme of mass political education will hopefully lead to more sophisticated and dynamic engagement with the membership and a greater likelihood of reaching deliberate and collective decision-making.

Vision visits

Liverpool Guild of Students

The Academic Officer, Grace Anderson and Democracy and Representation Manager, Daniel Login visited Liverpool Guild of Students to observe their Guild Summit on 26 November 2015.

Liverpool Guild's review had to led to the implementation of a random selection process with use of incentivisation for each Guild Summit; a maximum of 50 people invited who are representative of the wider demographic based on age, gender, mode of study, level of study and ethnicity. Guild Summit is externally facilitated. The Summit are briefed to be able to discuss and debate policy effectively. Preferendum is an option for all and can either be offered if there's no consensus or forced by 1% on a decision of Guild Summit.

Union of UEA Students

The Academic Officer, Grace Anderson, Democracy and Representation Manager, Daniel Login and Rep Coordinator (Cambridge), Jordan Lewis visited the Union of UEA Students to observe their Union Council on 11 February 2016.

UEASU operate a typically traditional elected Union Council model, responsible for deciding and debating policy, setting the direction of campaigning work and accountability of the Student Officer Committee. Chair of the Student Council is impartial, voluntary and elected by Council.

Future

Middlesex Students' Union, University of Salford Students' Union, Staffordshire University Students' Union and the University of Westminster Students' Union to discuss their full-time officer roles.

Proposed timeline of approval

24 August 2016
Board of Trustees

TBC October 2016
Annual General Meeting

11 November 2016
Board of Governors

Daniel Login
Democracy and Representation Manager

Dan Francis, (former) Development Consultant, NUS
Guy Stepney, Head of Student Engagement and Communication
Grace Anderson, Academic Officer

April 2016