



2018/2019 Governance Review Report

Osaro Otobo, President of Hull
University Union 2017-2019



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Executive Summary

Osaro Otobo, President of Hull University Union, conducted a governance review in trimester one with the support of staff this 18/19 academic year. Students were consulted over a 3 week period (22nd Oct - 9th Nov) across all zones. Feedback was gained through various methods to ensure lots of different groups of students could all contribute. Following on from the consultation period, a democracy workshop took place on Wednesday 5th December as the next step to this review. This workshop was open to all students including part-time officers (PTOs). There, we looked at what decision-making structures looked like currently at Hull University Union and what they could look like in the future. There was a focus on improving the core decision-making system, Union Council.

Following on from the workshop, a democratic governance working group was created for interested students, PTOs and chairs of zones to look at how we can have a better structure. To restructure Union Council so it better makes the needs of students it needed to go to referendum.

The referendum achieved a simple majority however didn't get the 2/3 majority required. After the referendum work still continued to make improvements to Union Council. Danny Ingram, Governance Zone Chair and Councillor for Scrutiny, was a member of the 'Democratic Governance Working Group'. After the referendum result, Danny worked with the President of Hull University Union to make improvements to Union Council. Danny brought three motions (seconded by the President) to Union Council on the 29th of April that were related to the Governance Review and they all passed.

The Accountability panel was then approved at the Trustee Board meeting on 23rd May. There will now be an accountability panel, a standardised report for student presidents and Part-time officers will now have to give monthly reports.



Introduction

This report documents the 2018/9 Governance Review carried out by Osaro Ootobo, President of Hull University Union. Ensuring that Hull University Union has a governance review every few years is part of the remit of the Students' Union President.

This report firstly explains what the purpose of carrying out the Governance Review, followed by what happened during the process and what the final result of the review is.

The main three parts of this report are:

Trimester One – Consultation & Feedback Implementation

Trimester Two – Proposal Development & Referendum

Trimester Two – Reformation of Governance & Accountability

Purpose of the Governance Review

Over the 17/18 academic year, the Officer Team received feedback from students that our democratic structures need to be improved. Student Pulse Survey data demonstrated that less than half of our members feel that the SU represents the views of students effectively and only 30% of students feel that they can influence decisions made by us. Feedback from students indicated that the various methods through which change can be made, especially our core decision-making structure Union Council, need to be more relevant and straightforward.

Your Ideas, one of the ways in which students can make change through our democratic structure, had a very successful year. We received 271 ideas from students through this mechanism. In contrast, over the 17/18 academic past we received only 6 motions at Union Council from students. The students that submitted ideas to the Your Ideas scheme were from all faculties (lowest engagement 16% Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), highest 33% Faculty of Business Law and Politics (FBLP) and many of the students (38%) are classified as 'non-engaged' students (not members of clubs / societies or course reps). This suggest that when we have a process that is accessible and open, as well as promoted well, more students will engage with it.

The 2018/19 Student President Team recognised that we needed to improve our democratic process committed to carrying out a Governance Review this 18/19 academic year. It was a President Team objective and a personal objective for Osaro, President of Hull University Union.

Over trimester one, the Student President Team committed to consulting with students to find out what they thought about our current structure and which values they'd want from the HUU democratic structure

After feedback was gathered and with the help of students, a new structure that reflects the values students want would be proposed. Then the next step would be to have a referendum on the proposed structure in trimester 2.

Trimester One – Consultation & Feedback Implementation

Students were consulted over a 3 week period (22nd Oct - 9th Nov) across all zones (Governance, Education, Sport, Activities and Welfare). Feedback was gained through various methods to ensure lots of different groups of students could all contribute.


Understanding how students currently feel about how they can make and influence change is vital in us being able to be a relevant Students' Union that truly works effectively for our students.

It was important to gain feedback from many students so many opportunities were created and provided including; drop-in sessions, focus groups, polling, online survey, zone meetings, AU council, societies council, Union Council and 1-on-1 meetings.



Imaging used to promote the consultation period and consultation events

Overall, the consultation period was successful, we engaged with many students and gained valuable feedback.



Two main questions were asked during the consultation period. The findings below cover the main themes that emerged.

Current Structure

The main question asked relating to the current structure was: what qualities describes the current methods you can influence decisions at your students' union?

The main themes that arose were:

- Poor advertisement publicity and communication
- Poor distribution of information, lack of clarity and intimidation
- Lack of functionality of the system

Poor advertisement publicity and communication

Students currently feel that there is not enough promotion about Union Council and it feels like it is advertised towards certain people – it is not accessible to all. Those that know union council think it is obscure and confusing. Here are some of the comments that reflect this theme:

- Too little promotion
- Not easily accessed by average student
- Poor feedback of decisions made
- Poor advertisement & awareness for students
- Feels like it is advertised towards certain people
- Inaccessible
- Obscure and confusing
- Not very open / well publicised
- People are unaware of how it works
- Not well communicated

Poor distribution of information, lack of clarity and intimidation


Students have said that currently Union Council is confusing because there are a lot of rules that you need to know before being able to take part effectively. Here are some of the comments that reflect this theme:

- Requires too much work for the average student
- Complicated
- Confusing and ambiguous rules
- Intimidating for new students
- The entire system is not communicated well to students outside the system.

Lack of functionality of the system

Currently students feel like our system doesn't work effectively for them. Here are some of the comments that reflect this theme:

- Poor
- Not student focused

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- Dysfunctional
 - Bureaucratic
 - Ineffective
 - Undemocratic
 - Uninspiring

Ideal Structure

The main question asked relating to what students potentially would like to see from HUU was: what qualities do you want to see from the methods you can influence decisions at your students' union?

The main themes that arose were:

- General ideal thoughts & feelings
- Publicity, communication, and transparency
- Ease of use and functionality of the system

General positive ideal thoughts & feelings

Students in general have positive optimistic feelings to how they would like union council to be like. Here are some of the comments that reflect this theme:

- Proactive
- More friendly environment
- Interactive
- Incentivised/rewarding
- Engaging
- Student-led
- Feeling it actually amounts to something
- Actually gives control to students instead of just looking like it

Publicity, communication, and transparency

Students have said that they want a system that is easier for more students to understand and get involved with. Many of the comments mention wanting a system that communicates effectively informing students of changes and keeping them in the loop. Here are some of the comments that reflect this theme:

- Diverse
- Clarity
- Accessibility
- Visible (make more known to students)
- Make the system clear and obvious and accessible to students outside the system.
- More accessible and approachable
- Transparent in terms of how the decisions are made at a staff level from student feedback
- Regularly updated

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- Improve communication
 - Publicising what is achieved

Ease of use and functionality of the system

Students have said that they want a system that is simple and effective and convenient for students to get involved in. Here are some of the comments that reflect this theme:

- Engage students better and get a turnout >10%
- Simple (a student can put forward an idea without it requiring too much work from them)
- Not as time consuming
- Easily accessible for ALL students
- A system that effectively works for students
- Straight forward
- Something quick, easy and convenient.
- A simplified system
- Easier, accessible achievable all the time

Survey results

One of the ways we also received feedback from students was from an online survey. This was to enable us to receive feedback from people that were not on campus or just preferred to give feedback online. The survey highlighted key areas. It demonstrated that the majority of students do not understand the current decision and policy-making processes at HUU. Out of the 173 students surveyed only 12 students understood 'very well' and only 21 understood 'quite well'. Out of the various ways you can make decisions at HUU the least engaging way was Union Council. Out of the 173 surveyed students only 8 students had engaged with Union Council.

Democracy workshop

On Wednesday 5th December a workshop took place to look at decision-making at HUU. We looked at other Students' Unions structures. This was heavily promoted online through paid posts and in person through leaflets and posters. It was also incentivised to attract more students to it. Part-time Officers were personally invited via email as they are integral parts to the way democracy works at HUU.



DEC
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Changing Your Future Workshop - inc. prizes!

Public · Hosted by Hull University Union

Screenshot of the democracy workshop facebook event



A leaflet incentivising students to attend the democracy workshop event



Workshop facilitator Stephen Dow of Stand & Be Counted,

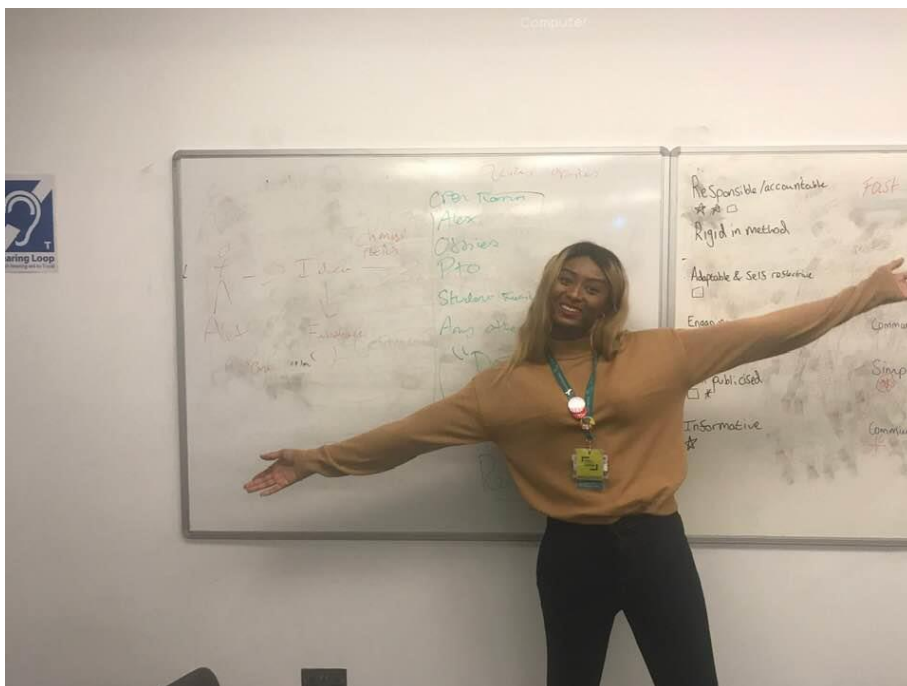
Students that attended the workshop said they wanted a structure that had these qualities:

- Accessible
- Simple
- Representative
- Streamlined
- Effective
- Engaging
- Inclusive



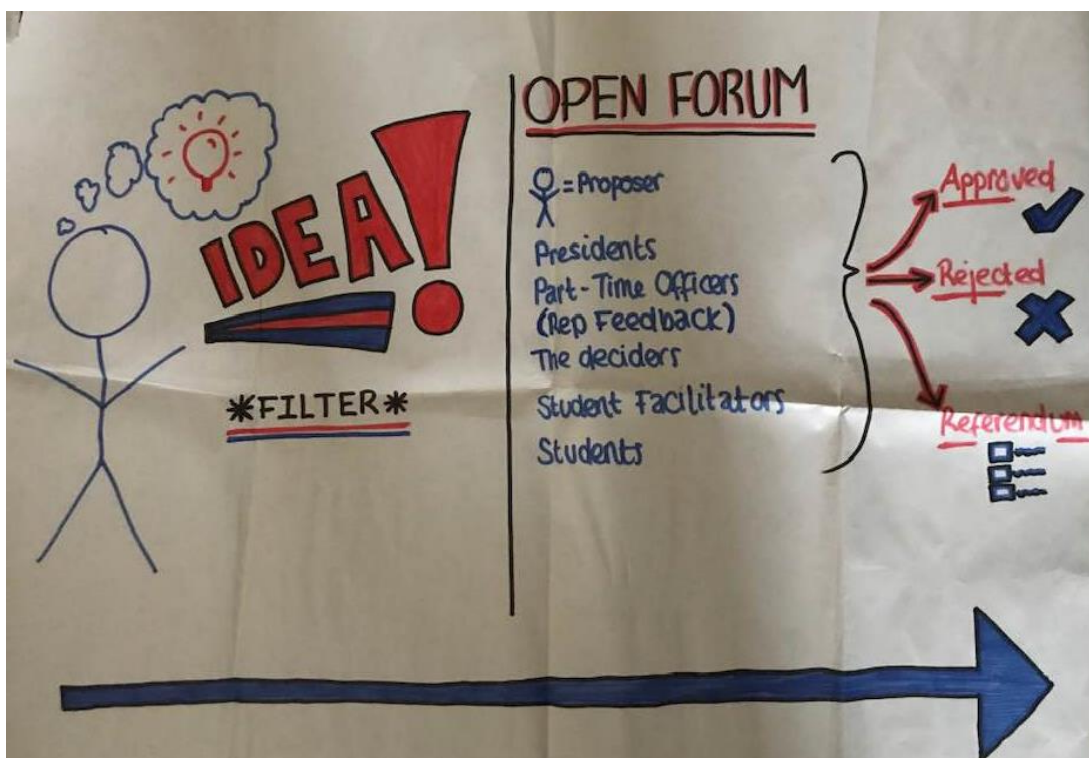
Qualities students want in an ideal structure

Prior to the workshop it was established through the consultation period that students were not happy with our current system and wanted a change.



Students shown other students' union structure and pictures here students shown the ideal structure the president team drew at their own democracy workshop

Students that attended the December democracy workshop were shown a structure that the Student President Team drew when they had their own democracy workshop with the same facilitator and explored what they thought the ideal structure for Hull would be. Students were asked what they thought about it. It had positive response, they liked the idea of having a Student Open Forum in place of Union Council. It is important to note that when this was shown, it was made explicit that the President of the Students' Union wanted to go with whatever structure that students thought was best. The President wanted students to shape the change to make it a success. To make any change to Union Council, the core student decision-making structure, it would have to go to referendum. The President of the Students' Union would only take this to referendum if they were confident about what structure students wanted and that enough people would vote.



President Team ideal structure drawn by Isobel Hall, President of Education

Trimester One Consultation Conclusion and Recommendations

Currently the ideal qualities that students have said that they want in their decision-making system is not truly reflectively in our current system. Whilst over students' unions have grown and developed their core decision-making system over the years to meet student needs, Union Council at Hull University Union has been in place since its inception. If HUU wants to be a relevant students' union it's core decision-making structure must work effectively for all students. Here were my recommendations as a result of the consultation period and the democracy workshop:

1. Hull University Union should hold a referendum in order to change Union Council, our core decision-making system, into an improved system that works better for students.
2. A working group for students interested in improving our system for better student decision-making must be created. Any potential new structure must be worked on in partnership with students – it has to be student-led.

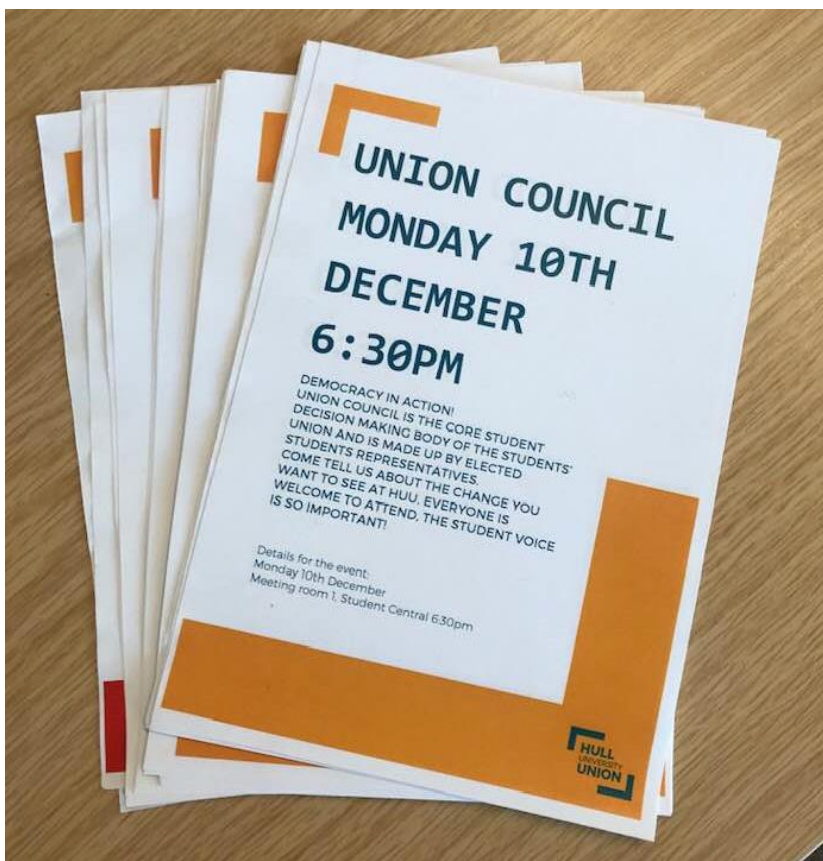
If we have a more relevant, accessible, open system it will be easier to communicate to students about what it is and how they can get involved. In turn, Hull University Union will be able to represent students more effectively and improve student experience.

Advertising Union Council

One of the issues student had with the current system was that they believed advertisement, publicity and communication about Union

Council was poor. At the moment Union Council is promoted through a Facebook event and email invites are sent to Part-time Officers to attend. More can be done to reach a wider group of students. One important thing to note however is that when students don't understand a system then it is hard to advertise and talk about it effectively. Also, when you succeed in capturing their attention and bringing them into Union Council, due to the other issues mentioned in the consultation period (e.g. process seems complex and imitating) then it is hard to get these students to stay at Union Council or come again another time.

For the 10th of December Union Council meeting, the President of the Students' Union worked on promoting Union Council. It was advertised on social media and in person. The President handing out leaflets in person and did an Instagram live video. One student that the President gave a leaflet to earlier came to Union Council. Unfortunately he left because he thought it was 'too complicated' and 'not engaging'.



The leaflets created and handed out to promote Union Council

Student President Team Objective

The Union Executive Committee meeting on Tuesday 4th December, the President of the Students' Union gave an update on the standing item 'Governance Review'. It was established then that the Governance Review would be taken forward as solely a personal objective and would no longer also be a team objective. This was due to the rest of the

president team feeling like they didn't have enough time to contribute to the review and they wanted to focus on their own personal objectives.

Trimester Two – Proposal Development & Referendum

The Democratic Governance Working Group was created and made up of students who were interested in creating an improved system that works better for students. Chairs of each zone, chair of council and councillors for scrutiny were invited to be part of the working group.

We looked at the structure that the president team drew and decided that the concept was good, they liked the idea of having a Student Open Forum in place of Union Council, but we still needed more changes to reflect what students want. The biggest supporters at the time were Jess Clunan, Chair of Council and Danny Ingram, Governance Zone Chair and Councillor for Scrutiny. Dan Bill, Sport Zone Councillor for Scrutiny, had the most concerns at the time about having a Student Open Forum in place of Union Council. However after he did his own research and looked at other students' unions that had Student Open Forums, he decided that he liked the idea.



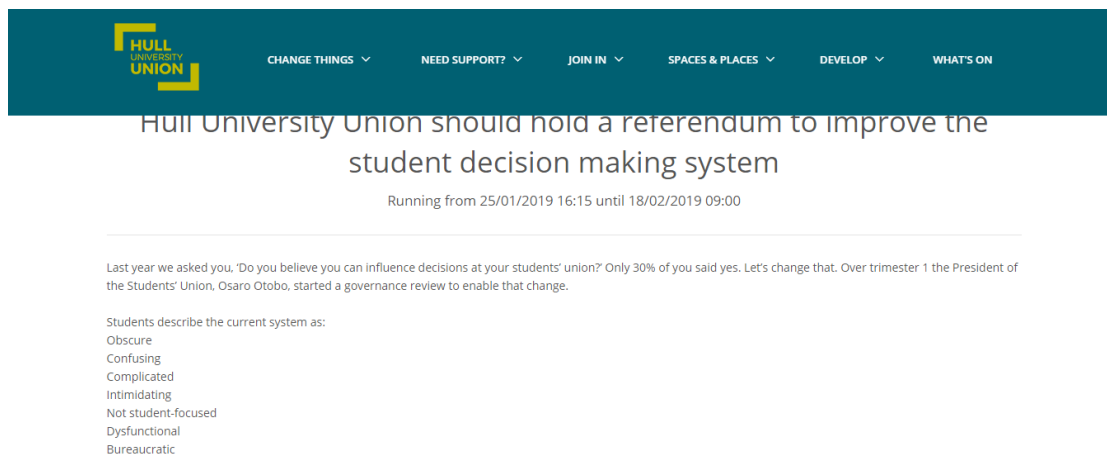
Chairs and councillors of scrutiny discussing the student consultation and the structure drawn by the student president team.

The Governance Review was a standing item to update on at Union Council. The final proposed ideal structure was created and presented at Union Council. Meanwhile, a petition was created to generate student support to go to referendum to allow students to vote on a proposed structure vs our current structure. 50 signatures were needed to trigger

a referendum and 89 signatures were gained – the most ever obtained for a referendum at Hull.

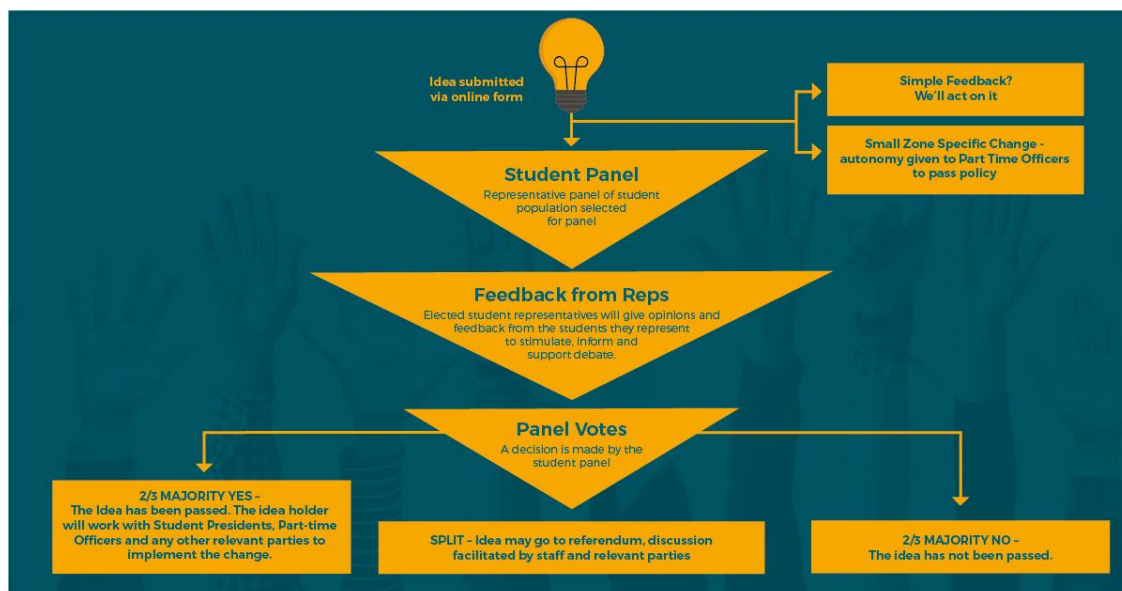
Referenda	Number of Student Signatures
Student Open Forum -2019	89
NUS disaffiliation – 2016	70
Removal of Student Faculty Hubs - 2018	61

Table showing Hull University Union Referenda history and number of signatures from students gained to trigger them.

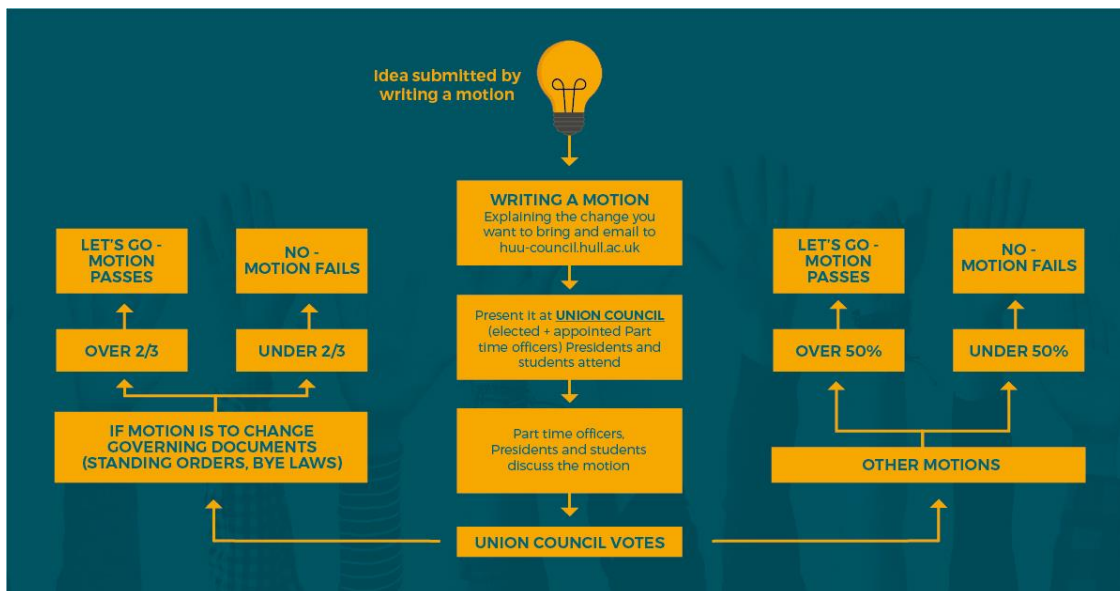


Screenshot showing part of the referendum petition online

After student collating student feedback and as a result of the Democratic Governance Working Group, we came up with a final proposed system.



Final proposed system

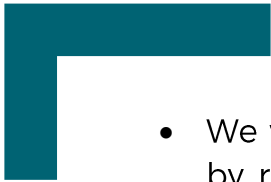


Current system

Manifesto points for Yes campaign

The Yes campaign was led by the President of the Students' Union. This is what the Yes campaign said Student Open Forums will enable for students:

- We will make it easy for any student to submit an idea to one of these forums outlining what they want and why via an online form. They don't need to know what a motion is or how to write one. Keeping it simple.
- We will involve more general students in the democratic process by recruiting and supporting a demographically representative student panel to attend each forum and approve the decisions made. At the moment, there are core student demographics that are not being represented at all or adequately enough at Union Council on a regular basis. By asking you, the average student, what you think about issues, we're opening up student democracy to all, making it engaging, transparent and accessible.
- We will recruit and train a student to act as a facilitator these forums so it is student-led.
- We will ensure that all student viewpoints are heard at these forums so that they create relevant policy.
- The relevant and appropriate student representatives/part-time officers will attend each forum to stimulate, inform and support debate.
- We will make the rules simple and easy to follow. You won't have to be an expert in student democracy to understand how to make change or how to follow the discussion.
- We will make student open forums timely. They will be approximately 1.5 hours long instead of 3 to 4 hours long.
- We will task Part-time Officers to go out and talk to the people they represent and then present their feedback at the forums to inform the panel decision.

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- We will ensure the issues that go to referendum are appropriate by referring proposals which are highly contentious from these forums to referendum and enable all students to decide the outcome.
 - We will amend the Union's by-laws and articles in line with this motion.
 - We will work with minority and liberation groups to ensure that their voices are heard within this democratic structure.
 - We will give Part-time Officers more autonomy to collectively pass straight forward policy that impacts their zones (i.e. updating a job role description to make it more relevant to what their current needs are).
 - We will effectively scrutinise Presidents by having a scrutiny panel to hold them to account.
 - We will make sure Presidents effectively communicate their work updates to the wider student population through various channels.

No campaign

Up until this point we had no one opposing the proposed system or anyone saying were happy with Union Council. The governance review and the proposed structure was presented to student presidents, part-time officers and students. February 18, 2019, the notice of referendum was posted.

On Wednesday 6th March, a few days before voted opened on Tuesday 12th March, a no campaign came forward with support from some part-time officers and some student presidents.

Referendum result

1738 votes were received in the referendum, meaning that it met quoracy. The quorum level was 1486 votes. The final results were: 981 voted yes to Student Open Forums, 625 voted no and there were 32 spoilt votes.

This meant that, whilst achieving a simple majority, the Yes Campaign did not achieve the 2/3 majority required. Had it achieved the majority it needed the concept of Student Open Forums would have been developed by Student Presidents and staff in consultation with our students to understand what that looks like for our Students' Union. To proceed, approval would have been sought after from students, the Board of Trustees and the University on the developed concept including the details of any changes that need to be made to our articles before going out for a final referendum to implement Student Open Forums.



Trimester Two – Reformation of Governance & Accountability

Danny Ingram, Governance Zone Chair and Councillor for Scrutiny, was a member of the 'Democratic Governance Working Group'. After the referendum result, Danny worked with the President of the Students' Union to make improvements to Union Council. Danny brought three motions (seconded by the President) to Union Council on the 29th of April that were related to the Governance Review and they all passed.

The Accountability panel was then approved at the Trustee Board meeting on 23rd May. There will now be an accountability panel, a standardised report for student presidents and PTOs will now have to give monthly reports.

What will happen now?

- **Monthly standardised reports for student presidents.** These reports will include objective updates, engagement with students, meeting attendance and feedback given to students.
- **Monthly standardised reports for Part-time officers (PTOs)** – the first time individual PTOs will be mandated to give a report. These reports will contain what they've done over the last month, their successes, and their plans for the next month.
- **Accountability Panels.** Previously reports may have been submitted without being scrutinised, sometimes reports have not have been submitted and sometimes reports have just been taken as read. Now we will have a panel of Councillors for Scrutiny to focus on holding student presidents to account effectively.
- **Monthly highlighted online.** Reports from student presidents and part-time officers will be highlighted online on social media to invite students to read what we have been up to.
- There will be a section on our website called '**Hold Us to Account**' which will show very simply all the ways you can hold your Student Presidents and Part-time officers to account.
- **Reports and minutes will be organised in a more accessible way** by month and committee abbreviations will be shown so you can better understand our structure.
- **Links to each Student President's reports** on their webpages. You'll be able to click on a student president and be linked to their reports.
- **Events for Union Council** will continue to be made so that you are aware of when they are.
- **Events for Accountability Panels** will also be made so you can attend too.



How can students get involved?

- **Run in the by-elections** for a Part-time officer position. If you want to know more please email elections@hull.ac.uk.
- **Talk to a Student President or Part-Time Officer** and ask them to explain the reasons behind any decisions they have made.
- **Read reports** which outline what your Student President & Part-Time Officers have done that month. If you have any questions about their reports email them or talk to them in person.
- **Attend an Accountability Panel.** Councillors for Scrutiny hold your Student President Team to account on the work they have done. You can attend and ask questions.
- **Attend Union Council.** To hear what decisions will be made at your students' union or to bring motions to change things.

Conclusion & Reflections

This 18/19 academic year I carried out a democratic governance review in order to improve governance & accountability at Hull University Union. Why is that important? It's important because with better governance & accountability the Officers students elect can do a better job in representing them and working on the issues they care about. Students will be able to influence decisions more effectively at their students' union. There will be some big changes next academic year as a result of student engagement with the governance review.

Despite getting a different result than the initial desired outcome, governance & accountability at Hull University Union has still been reformed in the biggest way in recent HUU history.

There is more work that needs to be done for Hull University Union to truly reflect all the concerns that students highlighted in the consultation period. It would take a democratic structural change. In the future, Hull University Union should do more work into improving the democratic structure. This will work best when there is a student president team that are all firmly committed to driving the change. For now, Hull University Union should work on making it easier to submit motions, they should try to promote the meetings better to a more diverse range of students and also try making it more engaging by ensuring more relevant student day to day issues are discussed.