**Let’s Talk About Decision-Making**

**Governance Review - Consultation Feedback**

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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 types 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 has been 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 will need to go to referendum. This report provides an overview of the consultation findings.

# 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, this past year 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% FHS, highest 33% 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, more students engage with it.

The Student President Team recognised that we needed to improve our democratic process and have 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 think about our current structure and which values they’d want from the HUU democratic structure. After the feedback has been received, a new structure that reflects the values students want will be proposed. This is with the hope of having a referendum on the proposed structure in trimester 2.

# Findings

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.

Overall, the consultation period was successful, we engaged with many students and gained value 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 unware 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
* 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 commutates 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
* 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 convent 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 main ways we received feedback from students was from an online survey. 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. Students that attended said they wanted a structure that had these qualities:

* Accessible
* Simple
* Representative
* Streamlined
* Effective
* Engaging
* Inclusive

# 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 not changed and has stayed the same since the beginning. If HUU wants to be a relevant students’ union it’s core decision-making structure must work effectively for all students. Here are my recommendation:

* 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.
* 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.