

Democracy Review 2010.

Deliberative, Direct, Localised Student Engagement

This document outlines a review of the current democratic process of LUU.

It makes recommendations based on this research suggesting how this process could be improved.

The review began with the identification of the main aims of union democracy:

1. Communicating and coordinating all student viewpoints
2. Providing a forum for discussing, making and implementing changes.
3. Holding decision makers and implementers to account

These features were identified by the current Student Executive.

Our aim is to devise a model that will fulfil these functions to the greatest extent possible.

This model will be proposed to referendum in April 2010.

Contents:

Strategic Review Research: p2 – p5

Student Brand Manager Research p.6 – p.7

Models of Democracy: p8 – p9

Student Union Models of Democracy: p10

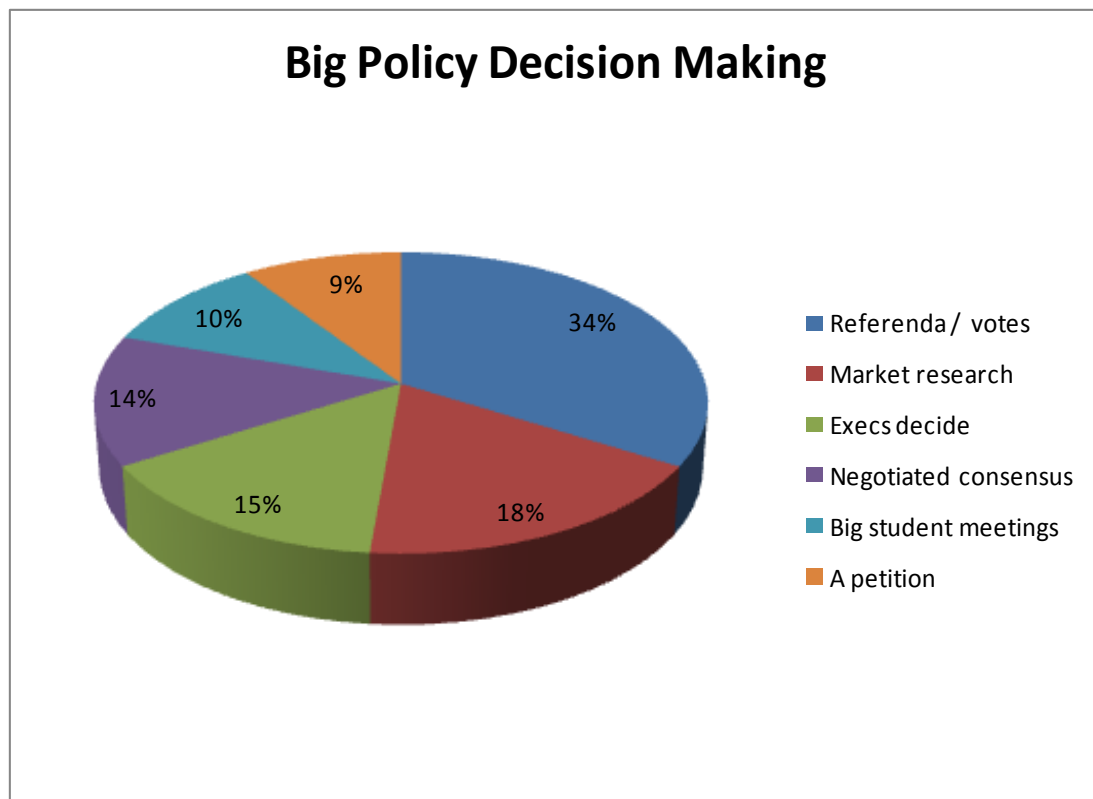
Stephen Coleman Research: p11

Democracy Review Workshops: p12 – p17

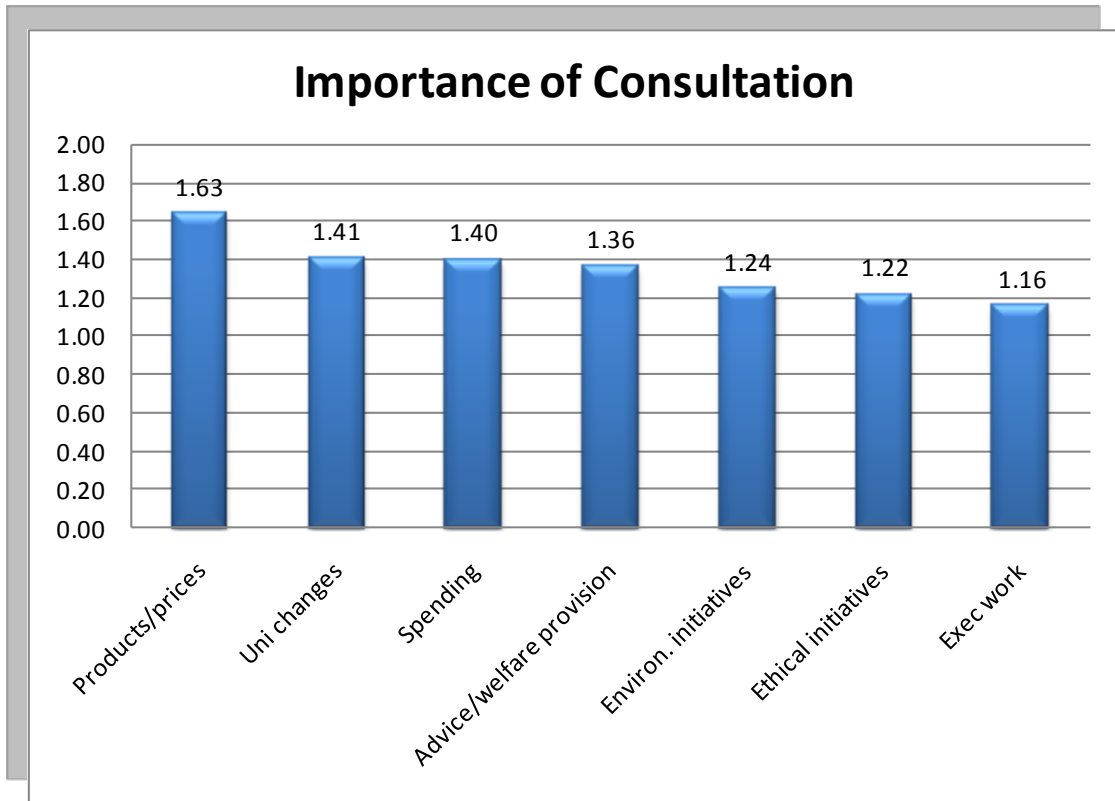
Recommendations p18 -p19

How it might work p20 - p22

Key stats from the Strategic Review 2009

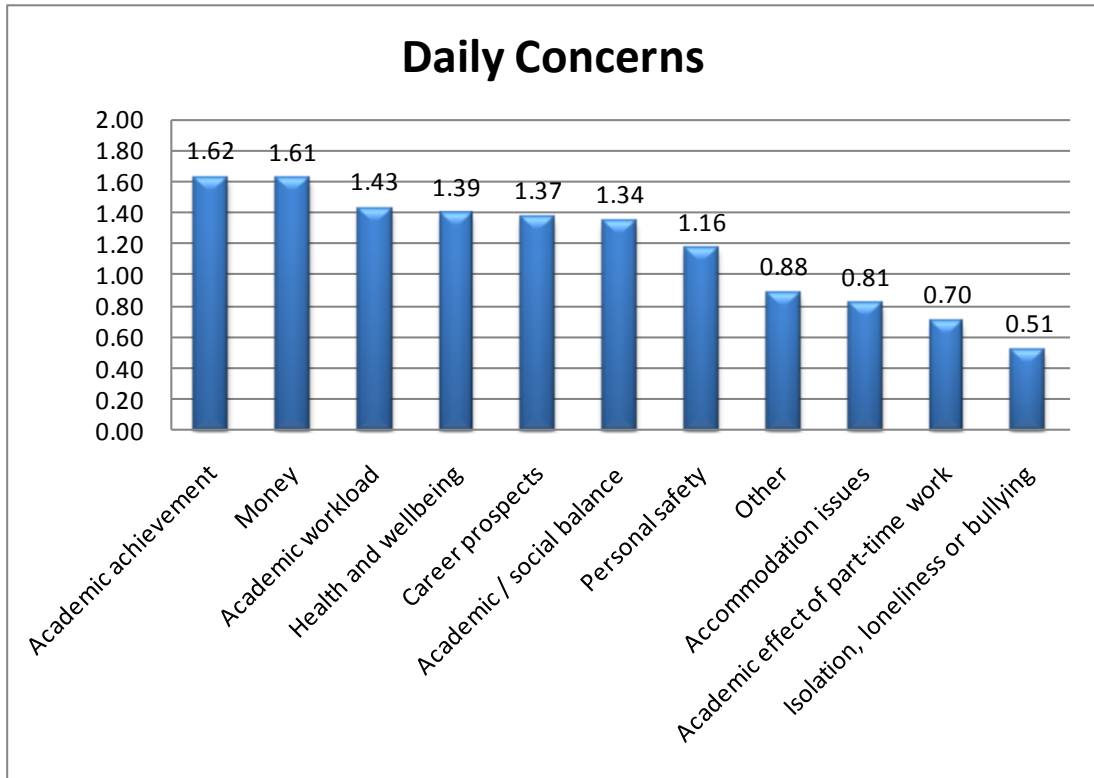


- When asked how big policy changes should be made, students are **pro-referenda and anti-petition**.
- Potentially this may reflect **a suspicion of the influence of small numbers** of 'activists' dominating democracy.
- Only 15% would be happy for elected reps to make all the big policy decisions on their behalf and **a substantial quantity would like to see market research used** in policy creation.

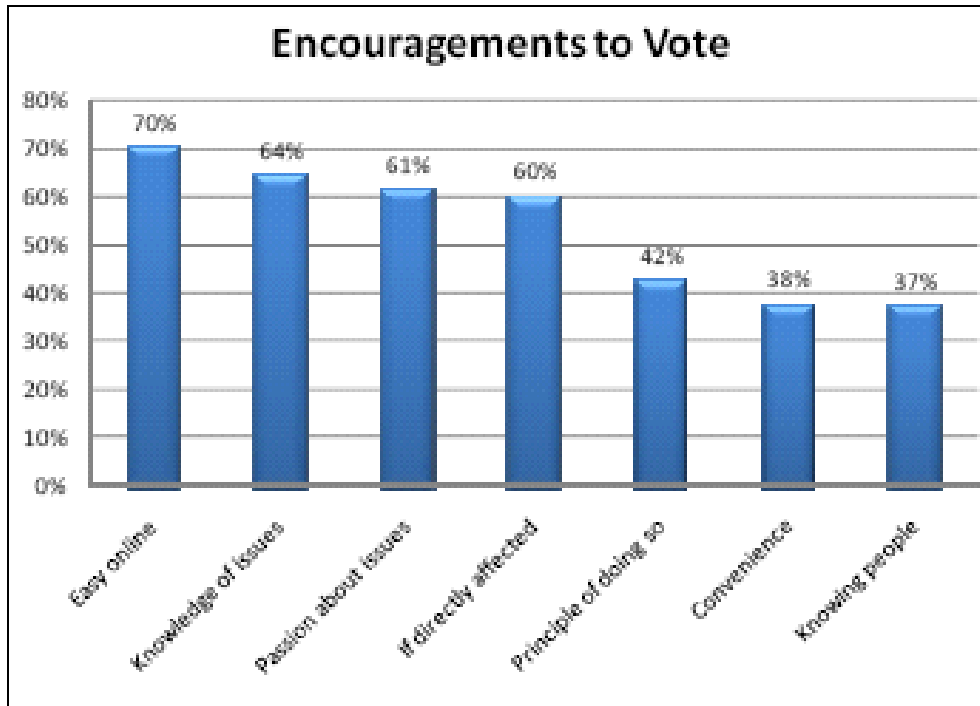


Despite a relative disinterest in 'democracy', members express a strong desire to be consulted on issues.

- Issues with an immediate fiscal consequence to them as individuals (pricing, changes to Uni. facilities and how Union money is spent) are considered of highest importance
- Broader societal issues (advice & welfare, environment and ethics) are seen to be of lesser importance.



- Academic issues are the greatest daily concern for members.
- Career prospects are a significant concern that grow over time.



Students also expressed strong opinions about how they could be encouraged to vote.

Online voting and **having a better understanding of the issues at stake** were the most common things students believed would increase their likelihood of voting.

The relevancy of motions was also a key concern, and it seems likely that students would have a greater understanding if issues were campus-based or more relevant in general. Education still remains an important factor in improving the understanding of motions.

Conclusions

- Students are put off democratic participation by irrelevant or frivolous issues
- There is a perception of a Union clique benefiting personal ambitions, not members
- The desire for better understanding presents an opportunity to engage
- There is a desire 'to be asked personally'
- Individual concerns affect what issues students engage with and how they participate in them
- Economic issues appear more important to students than ethical issues.
- Democracy at society level was perceived to be more active because of the community generated by like-minded people pursuing a common activity.

Student Brand Manager Research

The strategic review research posed further questions with regard to how students want to make decisions within the Union.

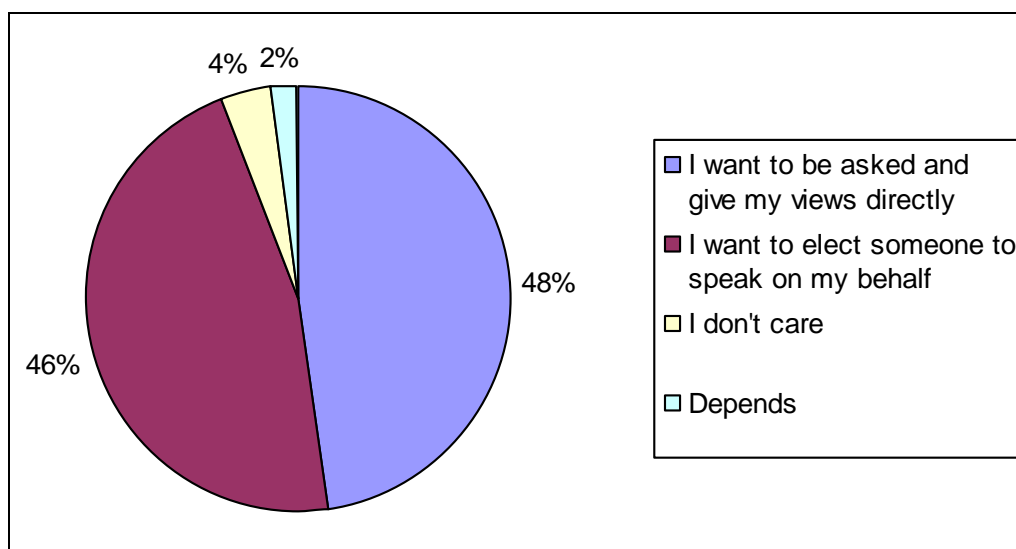
Consequently, we spoke to 369 students in the Union building and posed them the question, "How do you want democratic decisions to be made at LUU?"

Respondents were given the following options:

1. I want to be asked and give my views directly
2. I want to elect someone to speak on my behalf
3. I don't care

Out of the 369 people questioned...

- 176** wanted to be asked and give their views directly
- 171** wanted to elected people to speak on their behalf
- 15** did not care
- (7 people said that it depended on the situation)*



Comments from respondents

Comments were received from some of those polled.

- Several people said that they wanted more information about democracy
- Several people said that they wanted more transparency about democratic processes in the Union
- Some ideas people had about how to implement democracy in the Union were...
 - A 'Democracy day' with rallies and podiums
 - More leaflets and people talking about LUU democracy
 - Video clips about LUU election process
 - A giant video screen outside to let people know more about the process of democracy in LUU
 - Notice boards like the blackboard are much better than lots of e-mails
 - More big yellow boxes
 - A brief Democracy newsletter or email
 - A regular public question time
 - More communication about what the Exec actually do
 - A visible person responsible for receiving feedback about democracy

Following this consultation one student took the time to email the following to the CDS office:

"Don't divide us into categories, divide you e.g. into jobs that need doing in the union: Assemblies aren't good as they are specific and hard to fit into.

People don't have ideas but complaints so they want people to go and moan to, maybe make the reps do this.

No one is arsed about reading millions of manifestos for all the positions so I reckon have fewer positions

Union should focus on making our lives bigger and better (yeah!) so not too much hippy political stuff that no one understands as we feel left out!"

Models of Democracy

Before the proposal to review the democratic system at LUU was approved by referendum in November, extensive research was done into other forms of democracy. A brief summary of this research can be found below:

Direct democracy – responsibility for decision making is lodged with the citizens such as with our current referendum system

Grassroots democracy – where as much of the decision making authority as possible is shifted to the organisations lowest level of organisation

Participatory democracy – strives to create opportunities for all members of a political group to make meaningful contributions to decision making beyond just voting within the context of a representative democracy.

Consensus democracy – a process developed to ensure that minority opinion cannot be potentially ignored by a vote-winning majority.

Inclusive democracy (ID) – a political theory based on equal distribution of power at all levels.

ID Economic democracy – All macroeconomic decisions are made by the citizen body as a whole, collectively without representation. However microeconomic decisions at home or in the workplace are made using vouchers.

Representative democracy – when citizens delegate authority to elected representatives as with our current assembly system

Deliberative Democracy – considered a trade off between direct and representative democracy, this model relies on demographically representative popular consultation (similar to focus groups) to make sound policy. Of particular interest was a paper called *Nine Principles of Deliberative Public Engagement* produced by Involve and the National Consumer Council.

In addition, a number of other living, working models of democracy outside the student union field were researched including:

Senator on-line - An Australian political party that has pledged to conduct an online poll for every bill that passes before senate and vote accordance with the poll's clear majority

Party of Internet Democracy - A Hungarian political party which aims to give citizens direct control over rotating delegates to the European Parliament

Zapatistas - 500,000 people living in 32 municipalities, each one containing 50 to 100 communities. Each community meets every Sunday and identifies tasks to which they delegate an elected person to complete the work. These elected people make up a temporary council of reps who act on behalf of their communities. Leadership positions on this council rotate every 6 months. Special roles are given to elders and a quota system is used to ensure gender balance on the council. All subjects are re-calling if they are not seen to be leading by obeying. Delegates from each community attend a central council where small to medium scale decisions can be made. A "consulta" is used to make big decisions – this is essentially a referendum preceded by intense internal discussion within each community.

Residents Committee's in Brazil - Residents meet within their communities and discuss their collective needs. They then elect delegates to 16 city wide budget forums. These forums decide how tax is spent in the city. This system has been very successful and spread across Brazil and Spain.

Canadian Deliberative democracy – A demographically representative citizen's assemblies or "policy jury" was convened in British Columbia and Ontario to consider alternatives to the electoral system

U.S. ballot initiatives – What Roosevelt explained as "not to destroy representative democracy but to correct it whenever it becomes misrepresentative". A means by which a petition signed by a certain minimum number of registered voters can force a public vote (plebiscite) on an issue.

The Sudbury model of democratic education – a school meeting where students and staff participate exclusively and equally. Everyone who attends gets a vote but attendance is optional.

Student Union Models of Democracy

A number of models for decision-making within Student Unions were researched:

Sheffield - Sheffield has a council that contains one elected member from each academic department or school. Only members of that department can vote for their school representative. These localised elections led to a turn-out of over 3000 in their Union Council elections. They also have a women's, black, LGBT, international, postgrad, mature and disabled students rep. Proposals require the approval of two thirds of the members of council to be carried.

Nottingham - Nottingham has one representative from each of its 18 halls in the form of a JCR president. They also have one rep from each of the Staff Student Feedback Committees in each department. 12 elected sabbatical officers. 11 liberation representatives and one rep from each of their 5 faculties. However quorum is only half.

Manchester - Manchester has liberation representatives (LGBT, Disabled and Ethnic Minorities) where only women can stand and vote. 25 general members from the different academic faculties. 4 postgraduate members and a society's secretary.

Liverpool - Liverpool has three forums: Better Union, Better University, Better City upon which they elect the following delegates:

Better Union: a women's delegate; a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender delegate; a disabled students' delegate; and a black, Asian and ethnic-minority delegate

Better University: a part-time students' delegate; a postgraduate students' delegate; an international students' delegate; a Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts delegate; and a mature students' delegate

Better City: an Ethical and Environmental delegate, a Community Cohesion and Anti-Fascism delegate, and a Home Students delegate from all full members

Stephen Coleman Research

Between April and October 2009 CDS worked with Professor Stephen Coleman from the Institute of Communication Studies to survey 2,665 students from 130 universities. This survey investigated three key areas; Student Efficacy, Communication and what students consider “Political”. What follows is a brief summary of the conclusions from this survey.

Most students claim to have some interest in politics but what they mean by politics differs

Those who are more interested in politics:

1. Use communication technologies more than less politically-interested students
2. Have a narrower definition of the political than less politically-interested students
3. Feel that they have more power to influence national politics than less politically-interested students

Facebook users are not more or less political than non-Facebook users but they do define the political in different ways

Students who claim to be less politically-interested have lower political efficacy, but not when it comes to influencing university policies

Students are more likely to go online to change university policies than to attend the students' union – especially the less political

Students who claim to be less political have a broader conception of political action than those who claim to be politically interested

What do students regard as 'political'?

1. Voting in elections
2. Media consumption
3. University affairs
4. Talking
5. Culturally-symbolic action

We are now creating a typology of 'political types'

Democracy Review Workshops

Following the successful endorsement of the Union's strategic plan at referendum in November, three open workshops were held to allow students to feed into the review process. What follows is a summary of those workshops and notes from concurrent meetings.

Please note that much of the subsequent text is an exact copy of notes taken by students during meetings.

Workshop 1: Open Space Technology

This workshop allowed participants to decide what areas they felt the review needed to cover in order to ensure that democracy works at LUU. Three areas of investigation were identified and meetings held to discuss these points. The following ideas came out of those meetings:

1. Raising Awareness of Union Democracy and the relationship between policy and democratic decisions:

Students don't know the Union is democratic. Clear link between students asking for something and clear action being taken. A knowledge week could publicise this and show how students can get involved. People need to get out of the mind set of "what can I get out of something" all the time. Carrot and stick approach makes students expect to get something. Branding of democracy doesn't help students engage. People need to realise that the union is not part of the university and that the union can lobby to affect change in the university. Course reps are not used very well. Yes/ No perspective often not helpful and isolates some views which aren't yes/ no at referendum. Hall JCR's, staff wider range of people needed to get involved in decisions. Exec being more visible and approachable would help. Monthly union days to publicise union decisions. Having screens where you can text your ideas. Democracy can be an off putting word which is anti-democratic. Things need to happen faster in terms of changes; students are only here for 3 years and if something takes a year to happen the benefits are not visible/ felt. Information about when things will change would help with this. Get societies more involved and aware. Most students don't know what happens upstairs in the Union. Union council should be able to refer things to referendum.

Deliberation, Discussion & Communication

How can we get more involved? People need to see it as a democratic space rather than there being a primary focus on shops and bars. Structures are complicated so when students have grievances they wouldn't go to the union. Internet forums would be helpful for people to let off steam and debate safely without having to come to a meeting HOWEVER face to face discussion is really important too. Currently hierarchical structures place people at the table Vs people on the floor. How can we make sure students can participate equally? Proposers of motions should be equal to decision makers. Why do people need to be elected and divided into us and them left and right? Need space for in-depth discussion of particular issues and run surgeries alongside these discussions. Run more stalls but also try to talk to people outside the union building. Communication: people don't know who their reps are. Wider problem of Union: Focuses too much on being a physical place – should focus more on departments – know that they have reps. How can we capture people who vote to get them more involved? Problems of types of issues coming to referendum – they need to be related to students and they need to be divisive. Union Council passing very controversial things and referendum passing consensual is wrong. Destroy the Union? It's not a building it's a group of people. Squat the Union building. Assemblies are arbitrary boarders around grievances and issues. They're confusing and people don't know which to go to. Problem that people don't think that the union is for them and that it's run by a clique. We need to make them feel comfortable and that their opinions are valid/ legitimate – that anyone can come and have an equal platform. We need to localise and decentralise decision making. It needs to be exciting but people are put off by the language. The union should be discussing political theory. If we don't have elected representatives what does this leave us with? The Exec should represent students views not their own. We should have fewer signatures to remove the exec. What do students feel like they belong to?

2. Liberation and Accessibility

It is clear that our current structure does guarantee representation for these groups, however, assemblies have frequently been undersubscribed and unfilled. A focus on equality within education – E & D training for all academic reps. A focus on equality training within clubs and societies. Self defining groups electing their own representatives. Individuals elected from pre-existing societies or groups. I.e. Black rep being elected from ACS, Nigerian Society, Islamic Society, etc. A faculty based sabbatical system.

An increase of guaranteed representation. Outreach sessions & forums lead by officers as opposed to students. More accountability of reps. We may risk the loss or perception of guaranteed representation.

Workshop 2: Appreciative Enquiry

Appreciative enquiry attempts to identify the strong points of any system and how they can be made a larger part of the whole. The following were identified as positive aspects of decision making processes in LUU:

Referendum

Direct representation

Publicity/ influential

Visible/ transparent

More representation

Ownership

Encouraging politics

Challenging

Deals with the big issues

Legitimate

Wider

Accessible

Voting is simple

More online presence

Course Reps

Relevant to all students

Opportunity to talk to University

Dialogue with staff "on the level"

Keeping knowledge over years

Loyalty

Pushes education onto the agenda

Consistency

Not much bureaucracy

Assemblies

Based on affiliation

Assembly chairs status assures activity

The Activities Assembly works well as it's more localised

Steering Committee

Ensure students make decisions

NUS involvement

Clear criteria

An appeals body for checks and balances

The Exec

People vote for them – providing some level of legitimacy

Open Office – an accessible open space

Capacity to deliver – full time

University recognised reps

Access and communication

Clear remit

They're doers

Union Council

Discussion based and deliberative

Explores points of view

Deals with operational issues quickly

Opportunity to bring ideas together

Anyone can submit ideas

Structured

Workshop 3: Modelling Values.

In this session participants were asked to identify key values that should underpin the democratic process and then think about how these values could live in democratic structures. The key values were suggested:

Information must be targeted to interested parties

Methods must be instinctual

It must be less cliquey

Transparent (particularly economically)

Respectful

Not patronising

Every student should have the chance to participate

Other values seen as less important but still key were:

Effective

Accessible

It must utilise societies and existing networks more

Consult on important issues

Promote choice not restriction

We should publish accounts

Honesty

Both naturally interested and neutral people are required to hold others to account

Maximum participation

Use different forms of forum

Include everyone

Make information clear

Next in the workshop the following scenarios were devised:

One giant Union Council with the following reps: Hall reps, University Faculty Reps, Activity/ Community Reps, GSRs.

1. Communication

Use survey systems to consult. Use course reps and general student reps. Aspirations of all students and create policy from there. It must maintain personal freedom and the collective. Instead of campus wide there should be more internal voting E.G if hall reps are voted for within their small institution then people have more affinity with the vote. Likewise with votes within faculties.

2. Forum

Union council but with greater representation including hall reps course reps society reps and liberation campaigns. Perhaps focus groups could feed into it. Separating what Union Council can and cannot decide on. Make politics relevant but avoiding too many votes.

3. Accountability

Could a jury system bring neutrality? No ordinary students care. Anonymity is important in terms of establishing neutrality and fairness. Remove political positions from steering committee such as the CIA officer.

Recommendations

It is clear from the research that no one form of democracy seems appropriate to fulfil the needs of decision making at LUU. However the models below have their benefits:

Economic democracy – relevant as students are interested first and foremost in fiscal issues and how it affects them. Giving members a direct say in how union money is spent would be likely to help promote the idea that LUU is led by its members and would increase participation.

Deliberative democracy – using demographically representative focus groups in the creation of policy could eliminate the perception of union politics being a clique, guarantee a minority voice in decision making, tie in the desire for market research as a method of decision making, educate non-involved members about union decision making and ensure deliberation amongst “general students” on policy issues.

Direct democracy – Referendum (a form of direct democracy) is the most popular form of decision making as it allows everyone a say on the big issues. This makes the process more open participatory and less cliquey.

Consensus democracy – A more consensual process would encourage students to try and find mutually agreeable solutions, break down factions and promote political cohesion. It would also help ensure minority voices are not dominated by a well organised majority.

Representative democracy – electing members ensures participation by installing a sense of duty within the elected candidate and in turn creates capacity for action and change. It ensures deliberation amongst elected students. Furthermore, members do not wish to be consulted individually on all issues and therefore are happy for an elected representative to speak for them.

In addition to this the following seem to be consistent themes throughout the research:

In terms of grouping students together **we need to look at what students have a natural affinity to** such as their school, department, where they live or what society they're a member of. In light of this, having departmental reps, society reps, hall reps and community reps taking a more a direct role in decision making makes a lot of sense. Decision making should become more localised and done by those who the issues are relevant to.

Policy should be acted on quickly and effectively in order to install belief in the democratic system amongst the membership. Democracy should be measured as a complete cycle: Measuring both the input and the output of the process I.E a) number of ideas submitted b) number of votes or participants in the decision making process and c) to what extent that decision/ policy is acted upon and implemented successfully.

Voting should happen simultaneously within the different student localities (halls, societies and schools). In other words all union elections should be used to measure democratic activity rather than only those that occur centrally.

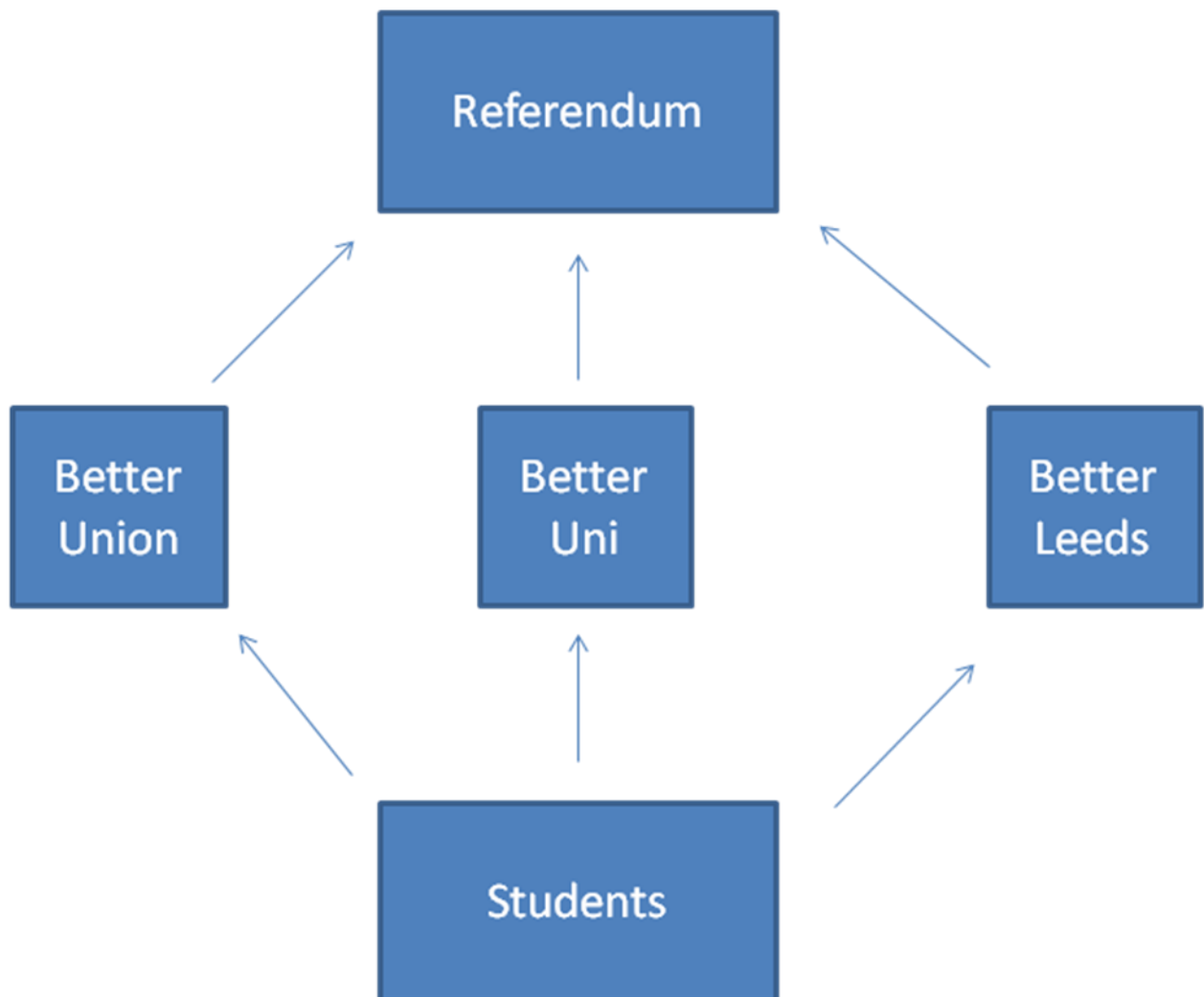
It's essential that any new form of democratic organising ensures that **minority groups are represented.**

The system must **embrace wider participation** from more students in combating the perception that the union is run by a clique.

The **language used around democracy needs to change** to make it more instinctual and accessible.

How this might work

In order to explore these recommendations the democratic structure below has been drafted. Further explanations for why things have been devised in such a way can be found in footnotes at the end of the document.



Students submit ideas for things they want to change online. These ideas are called Proposalsⁱ and have two clear sections: i) What I want ii) Why I want it. These proposals are submitted to one of three different councils Better Union, Better University or Better Leedsⁱⁱ. These councils have the following make up:

Better Union

Held once a month with the Union building. In attendanceⁱⁱⁱ would be:

- The Communications and Internal Affairs Officer
- The Activities Officer
- Political and Campaigning Rep
- Martial Arts Rep
- Dance Rep
- Sports Rep
- General Interest Rep
- Performing Rep
- Faith and Culture Rep
- Volunteering Rep
- Outdoor Rep
- Media Rep
- Departmental Rep
- Black and Minority Ethnic Rep (elected by BME students)
- LGBT Rep (elected by LGBT students)
- Disabled Students Rep (elected by disabled students)
- Women Rep (elected by women)

Activities reps are elected by all members of those societies that fall within their cohort. Any member of those societies can stand for election.

Better University

Held once a month with the University building. In attendance would be:

- The Education Officer
- The Equality and Diversity Officer
- One rep from each school within the University of Leeds
- Departmental Rep

Better Leeds

Held once a month within a public place in LS6 (Leeds)

- Community Officer
- Welfare Officer
- 9 Community Reps
- 19 Presidents of Hall Committees
- 1 volunteering rep
- 12 Neighbourhood Watch Student Co-ordinators

For each council a randomly selected, demographically representative sample of the student body are financially incentivised to participate^{iv}.

This student panel is invited to discuss the proposals submitted to the council.

The reps on each panel are there to stimulate, inform and support this discussion.

Following such deliberation^v, the student participants^{vi} will be asked to express their views and, when necessary, take a vote.

In order to pass a proposal, a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority^{vii} is necessary.

If either the panel or the reps fail to attain a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority (yes or no), then the proposal would be referred to referendum^{viii}.

Referendum motions would only be amended or withdrawn by the proposer based on factual accuracy or the returning officer on legal grounds.

Once policy is passed the Student Executive would work on implementing the policy and reporting their progress at future councils as with the current UC system.

These meetings are facilitated by student staff who are trained and performance reviewed by their council.

Seats would be made available at all councils for other students to attend.

The AGM

The AGM would provide an opportunity to explore the benefits of economic democracy by providing a nominal sum of money for the members in attendance to decide on how it should be spent. This would be done on a one member one vote basis. As with the Brazilian model the amount of

money decided upon could increase year on year as both the students and staff at the union become more familiar and confident in the process. The AGM would also provide a great opportunity to allow members to discuss big fiscal issues such as the affiliation to the NUS.

Timeframe

- 25.01.10 An executive summary of the proposal is placed on the LUU website for student comment
 - 29.01.10 An open meeting is held in LUU to discuss the proposal with interested parties
 - 01.02.10 The proposal is redrafted in line with feedback
 - 02.02.10 The proposal is checked legally and with the University
 - 09.02.10 The proposal is submitted to referendum
 - 28.04.10 The proposal is either passed or falls
- If the proposal is passed at referendum:
- 01.05.10 CDS plan to action the proposal
 - 09.09.10 The proposal is implemented.

Endnotes

ⁱ This will make the language clearer and replace motions with notes, believes and resolves.

ⁱⁱ Calling them “Better” creates a common goal of the forum to improve life for students. Decentralising the current union council into three parts will help keep meetings localised, relevant and more concise.

ⁱⁱⁱ Reps are invited to meetings which are specifically relevant to them. Two of the sabbatical officers attend each council in order to both feedback on their progress and give advice on policy decisions.

^{iv} This sample would ensure minority representation in terms of decision making by ensuring participation by groups such as LGBT, black and minority ethnic and disabled members

^v This ensures informed deliberation is part of the democratic process

^{vi} Involving randomly selected students to make decisions is a great way of involving new people in the democratic process

^{vii} A high majority would have the benefit of making it difficult for a majority faction to dominate a minority and therefore encourage compromise and cohesion. This means reaping some of the benefits of a consensus process without the problems of consensus such as one participant stubbornly opposing a proposal.

^{viii} This would serve to ensure that the proposals that were put to a campus wide ballot were genuinely divisive and not frivolous.