



# UUSU Governance Reform

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## Why is UUSU changing?

The University of Ulster Students' Union (UUSU) has been constituted since 1984. The governing structures and strategic direction of the organisation has not changed significantly since its' inception. However, the student market and demographic has. A paper published by the National Union of Students (NUS) in 2009 '*A Wave of Change: The Future Landscape of the Student Movement*' set out five key changes that NUS predicted would have a huge impact on Students' Unions in the following five years. These are:

- **The importance of the Student Voice:** as marketisation of the Higher Education Sector continues, and students are expected to pay more for their education, they are going to be more vocal in ensuring the quality of their provision;
- **A Hyper-diversity within the Student Body, the Education Sector and Students' Unions:** 18-21 year old full time undergrad students are no longer the predominant group of students on campus, also Universities need to seek new income streams from research and attracting international students, all of these factors are bringing diversity to the HE sector;
- **Changes in Students' Union Funding Sources:** as public spending on higher education decreases, so will the block grant. Also, economic trends are having an impact on the commercial interests owned by student unions;
- **Changing Student Lifestyle and Participation;** part time study is on the increase and students are increasingly looking at the possibilities offered by compressed two year degrees, also there is the rise of online learning. All of these things impact on the amount of time students are at their institution and therefore the time they have for their Union;
- **The Rise of Digital Media;** as a means for social interaction, but also as mentioned above, for distance learning

The full document, and a follow up paper '*Surfing the Wave*' are available online: <http://www.nus-connect.org/>

Even before the above paper was published, the leadership of UUSU recognised that the organisation needed to adapt to current realities. In January 2008 UUSU embarked on the Students' Union Evaluation Initiative (SUEI). SUEI is: a 'quality assessment model that assists in improving the services and activities delivered to members of Students' Unions by indicating areas for continuous improvement' (<http://www.suei.co.uk/>). Basically it is a model for best practice which Unions across the UK have been adopting to ensure they are responding to the changing Higher Education sector and are delivering for their members.

It was clear from the beginning of the SUEI process that the structure of UUSU did not successfully encourage participation from a wide cross-section of students in its democratic procedures. Union meetings were poorly attended and the majority of policy making and campaigning came from the full time Officers, and their message seemed to be getting lost when trying to communicate it to students. Membership of student run societies is low (not including the Sports Clubs) and there are very few opportunities for students to volunteer.

The 2009-10 Overall Executive team commissioned an external consultant to research the current structure and to report on how the Union could best move forward as an organisation.

### Governance Review Recommendations

The full report outlined thirteen recommendations aimed at improving the service delivered by the Students' Union. Seven of these recommendations related directly to the governance of UUSU and how it could more effectively engage students and deliver for their needs:

1. Revise the management structure of the UUSU to increase the accountability and enhance management through the introduction of a Trustee Board;
2. Review and update the constitution to take account of the new management structure and increase accessibility;
3. Redevelop the strategic plan taking account of new consultation and Review findings. This should also include the development of a Performance Monitoring System to allow the UUSU to more effectively baseline its activities and promote the work it undertakes in supporting students;
4. Reduce the number of sabbatical officers to six and revise their role to focus on the delivery of the UUSU strategic plan and its objectives, this will enable a more consistent approach to the development of the UUSU and its activities;
5. Develop the academic representation focus of the UUSU to enhance student's time at university. As part of the service a review of the Class Representative service should be undertaken to address areas of inconsistency;
6. Develop a Volunteering/Work Skills programme to support students to enhance their employability and to become more involved in the UUSU;
7. Increase the level of staff to allow the UUSU to more effectively meet the needs of students, support sabbatical officers and enable a greater level of engagement with students.

The remaining five focussed on the operational and commercial management of the organisation which is not the focus of this paper, the full report can be accessed through our website:

([http://uusuu.org/files/paper\\_1\\_uusu\\_governance\\_review\\_jul\\_10.pdf](http://uusuu.org/files/paper_1_uusu_governance_review_jul_10.pdf)).

The current Overall Executive reviewed the consultation in depth over the summer and following long discussions within the committee and consultation with members of General Council the following four major reforms are proposed:

1. Restructure of Sabbatical job roles and reduction in number to 7;
2. Employ 2 extra full time staff members to support Officers and students;
3. Introduction of a Trustee Board, which would include external members;
4. Removal of Union General Meetings, to be replaced with 'Policy Hubs'.

## 1 & 2: Sabbatical Positions and Additional Staff Members (Approved by General Council)

The decision regarding these proposals were approved by General Council in November 2010.

The decisions means that there are now seven sabbaticals and two additional staff posts have been created

### 3. Trustee Board – Member Referendum

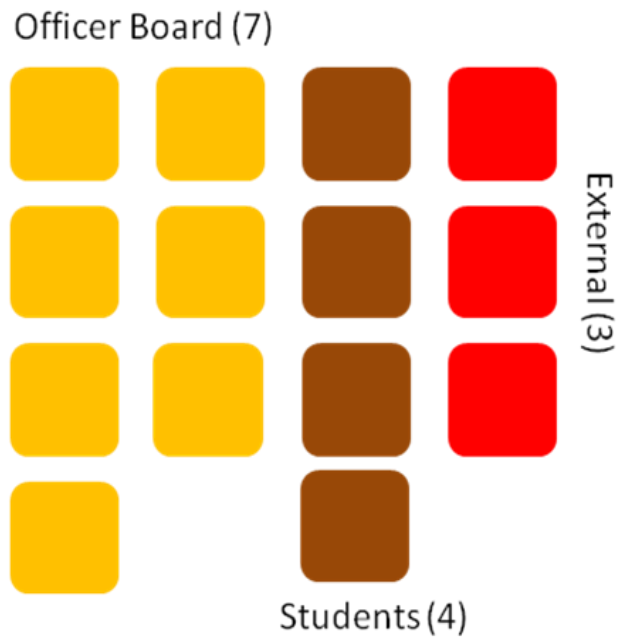
A 'trustee' of a Students' Union is one of a team of people who take ultimate responsibility for the legal and financial decisions UUSU takes as an organisation. Currently the trustees are the 9 full time Officers of the Students' Union who are elected by you each year.

In moving forward it has been recommended that external members from the private, public and education sector should be recruited to join a new Trustee Board. This would give a level of expertise and knowledge that elected officers generally do not have. An open recruitment process would take place to ensure the correct blend of skills and knowledge are present on the board. The external Trustees would be selected by a panel consisting of Senior Staff and General Council members (they will also be subject to removal by the General Council). Additional student members would also be elected from cross-campus elections to ensure the student voice is strong on the committee.

By law the Trustee Board would be the highest authority within the Students' Union. It would provide legal and financial oversight of all the activities of UUSU. They would also play an important role in setting the strategic direction of the organisation, and ensuring staff and Officers are delivering their stated aims.

The Trustee Board would meet four times a year to perform their duties. The Overall Executive Committee would remain the forum for the day to day running of UUSU. Staffing issues would be a devolved issue to a sub-committee of Senior Management and Officers, similar to the current of Staffing, Finance and General Purposes Committee.

This proposal already has the full backing of the Officers of the Union and the General Council. It is now subject to a referendum of our membership.



14 Members (Quorum 8) – No meeting could take place unless Students/OB outweigh External 2:1

#### 4. Union Democracy: Policy Hubs, Campus Councils and General Council

##### Policy Hubs

It is clear that students are not currently leading the agenda of the Students' Union. The Union General Meetings are ineffective in attracting students to participate, either by submitting motions or by attending the meetings.

The suggestion is to replace UGMs with 'Policy Hubs': this would mean doing away with the large campus meetings. 'Policy Hubs' would be small meetings that students with common interests, such as education policy, or international solidarity would meet to develop Union policy. There would not be any limit set on the minimum or maximum number of students needed to attend these at each campus. They would be open for all students to attend, however a Chair would be elected to ensure they were run in accordance with some structure. The policies generated from these meetings would not automatically pass: they would be taken to General Council, and possibly referenda, for ratification.

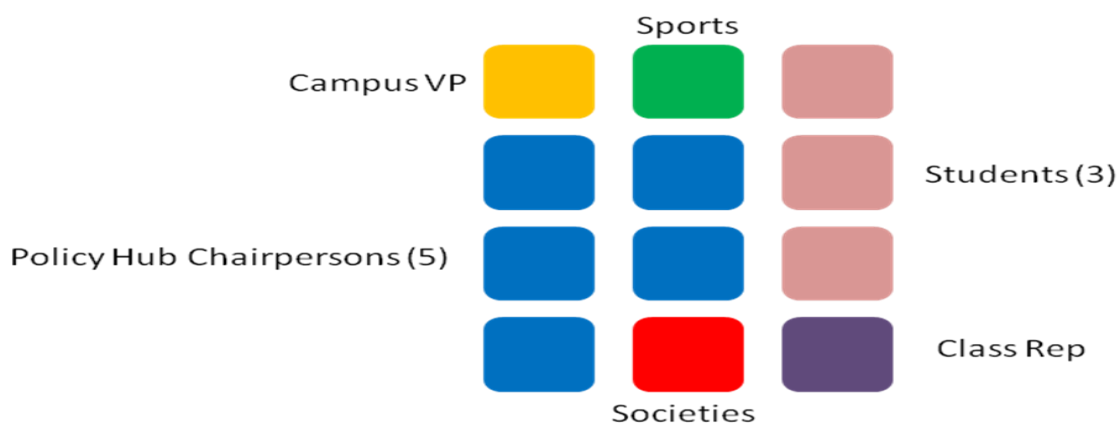
The Chair of each of these hubs would be decided by campus ballot and the Chair would also be the equivalent of a site executive member at their campus.

The policy hubs would give the Students' Union an issue based focus, so for example they could be: Academic Issues; Equality Campaigns; Community Relations; Improving the Student Experience/Campaigns.

To ensure as many students as possible have been consulted on the policy of the Union each semester a number of policies which have been drafted by the hubs could go to campus-wide referenda. This way the greatest amount of involvement possible is being encouraged.

### Campus Council

This would replace the current system of the Site Executive. It will streamline the amount of possible positions, focussing the work on the five main areas of the Policy Hubs, and keeping the positions of Societies Officer and Sports Campus Representative. There will also be a position reserved for a Class Representative who would be elected from their peers. A full explanation of the Campus and General Councils can be found in Appendix 6.



Total Membership: 12 Councillors (Quorum 7)

### Conclusion

Following consultation from our peers within the Student Union sector through participation in SUEI and further consultation of our members and stakeholders during the Governance Review, the current Overall Executive recommend these changes.

Recommendations 1 & 2 have been accepted and passed by General Council. Recommendations 3 & 4 will go to a referendum in early Semester 2, with the full backing of the Overall Executive and General Council.