

New Rules - Elections

Nick AJ Smith

Consulting

Students' Union elections have followed a tried & tested model for years. It does feel though that they are becoming more tired & testing as assumptions, requirements and demographics shift. We work in an environment that often doesn't give us time to reflect as much as we'd like but there is room to explore new models and approaches for elections. What I offer here are not complete solutions but 9 possible models for how elections and electing student leaders might occur.

I've not covered ideas on policy forums, officer roles or accountability mechanisms, all of which are part of a democratic ecosystem and would likely need adaptation in relation to all these ideas. I also don't necessarily agree with all these models but believe they could all be used. This is a starter for 10 to help you reflect on what could be possible.

Nick

The approach - Acts, Goods & Values

"Keep your minds open but not so open that your brains fall out." (Walter Kotschnig)

Blue sky thinking gives you a new perspective but a sky is still the same planet that you are starting from. To avoid falling into a black hole of irrelevance, I've set some rules based on legislation, democratic goods and student leadership. The models are considered in relation to what I've called the status quo model (1 year elections with some training for candidates and electing each role separately through transferable vote).

The 1994 Education Act

An awful lot of nonsense and misunderstanding surrounds this piece of legislation. In part this is because it's never been to court and so there's an absence of case law to define some elements. At this point I add a huge caveat to this section therefore which is that I'm not a lawyer and the below is not legal advice. It is, however my thoughts on the sections of the act relevant to elections based consideration of these passages for over a decade.

"The governing body of every [university or institution]... shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that any students' union for students at the establishment operates in a fair and democratic manner..."

Right at the top of the section is this core piece. It's the duty of the university (not the SU) to uphold the act through reasonably practical steps. In real life this means that the university governing body delegate this to a clerk, other staff member or a subcommittee to look at every few years.

Lots of the rest of the act's requirements here are specific and binary - such as length of terms. The definition of "fair and democratic" can be cut in many different ways and is a subjective value. Some institutions may see limited posts to certain students as unfair or believe that student trustees being appointed is undemocratic, even though half the SU sector appoints them. It is also worth saying that being democratic probably is supposed to be more than just elections, especially if those elections result in a minority of trustees on a board or if there's no policy forums or spaces for discussion among students. Sabbatical elections may be the icing on the democratic cake but they aren't the whole cake.

For an SU it means that any structure you come up with should be agreed by the university governing body or someone that this decision has been delegated to and that it's recorded that they believe it meets their definition of "fair and democratic".

"appointment to major union offices should be by election in a secret ballot in which all members are entitled to vote"

Two things here that need discussion. "major union offices" are usually defined as the sabbatical roles - the NUS model governing documents do precisely this in fact but there's no accrual definition in the act itself. Your members are every student who has not opted out which is simple enough but the university might need to consider things such as partner institution students, oversees campuses and other spaces where a

learner is part of the institution in some way. It's this section which many students' unions rely on to elect part time liberation officers by and from a section of the student population on the basis that they aren't sabbaticals and therefore major union office holders.

“the governing body should satisfy themselves that the elections are fairly and properly conducted”

Remembering the “reasonably practical” steps here this usually means that the university agrees that the appointment processes for a returning officer are correct and that their judgement can be trusted as well as the process for any appeals and the setting of rules.

Procedures aside, I also think the “properly conducted” aspect should consider election candidate welfare and the stresses involved. Good universities often mention this when election complaints come to them and there's lots of excellent examples of this work in the students' union sector.

One additional thing to consider about “properly conducted” (that we have no clear guidance on in May 2023) is how this will interact with the freedom of speech legislation in England. If a candidate wishes to stand on a platform that is lawful but against “students' union values” a union may not be able to regulate against them in the upcoming legal framework. “Properly conducted” may have to mean being actively divisive for a university community or the exact opposite.

“a person should not hold sabbatical union office, or paid elected union office, for more than two years in total at the establishment”

A section in commas can clarify as an aside, such as this, or describe separate points, features or things.

Almost every institution I've worked with has decided that the '94 Act extract above is a clarification. This means that sabbatical union office is also known as paid elected union office. And where we get two year sabbatical positions from.

It could otherwise be drafted as “A person should not hold sabbatical union officer or other types of paid elected union office...”

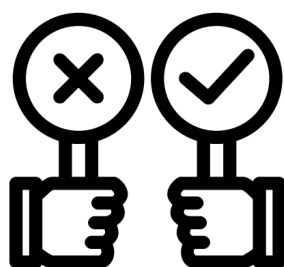
Assumptions

So models below assume the following unless otherwise noted:

1. The university needs to agree it and holds the judgement on whether it is fair & democratic
2. Voting for sabbaticals must be done by everyone
3. Elected, paid offices of any type are 2 years maximum.

Companies & CIOs

Many students' unions will be either private companies or charitable incorporated organisations. There are various member rights embedded in these pieces of legislation which I'm not listing here but I have considered in the models. In some cases though using the models would require a change to governing documents.



Democratic goods

As well as the requirements of legislation, I've also considered new models in the context of the analytical model proposed by Graham Smith in "Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation (Theories of Institutional Design)" (2010).

Below I've summarised the different democratic goods he proposes and how I've applied them.



Inclusiveness

Any model should ensure that different social groups can take part and that there is an equality of voice within them.

True assessment of every possible group engaging in an SU election would be the subject of a PhD and equality of voice will often be based on each institution's specific context. However I've rejected anything that would actively discriminate against a group and given consideration where a model might need to assure marginalised groups can take part (see efficiency below also).



Popular control

Decision making should be made by the majority and have a meaningful impact.

In our context we can thank the requirements of the 94 Act that everyone must be able to vote to some extent though clearer higher turnouts would be positive.

The meaningful impact aspect requires the choices of the electorate to be different in some way. This could be that manifesto pledges that are expected to be kept and accountability that support this for example or by having candidates from different backgrounds that may impact culture and decision making. Officers can't be elected simply to "paint by numbers" the work of the students' union with no autonomy or ability to apply nuance.

There's also the need for popular control in agenda setting. Officers can't only operate in strict lines, or rather the lines need to be very clear before the electorate make their choice. The old example of an officer being elected on £1 a pint only to find they can't implement it because of financial due diligence rules springs to mind, but also where projects are underway that can't be halted. The 3 year contract with the website provider that can't be broken despite what the new VP Activities says.

I'm not (and shouldn't) advocate simply ignoring these things but I do think electorates and candidates need to know which agendas can be set by their choices.



Considered judgement

This leads us nicely into the third democratic good - the electorate should have considered judgement in their choice.

In part this is about the context of the roles being chosen. I've spoken before about the frustration students can have when they don't understand the role ("The president sits on university council, why can't they reverse tuition fees?" "The sports officer looks after all 300 student groups, why can't they tweet about our event?").

The other element is student voters appreciating how their views sit into a wider community and an understanding of how their actions affect others. My voting to ban 9am lectures may impact those who need earlier patterns of learning to get to their jobs later that day. There are disagreements between faith groups and liberation groups that can be resolved but you have to have understanding of these issues to make a considered judgement. All of these means electoral process should remove not reinforce silos among students.



Transparency

This good basically says that democratic processes should be open and transparent.

I feel for students' unions here because actually they do so much in terms of communication. Members might get 3 emails explaining they have to vote & how, their website and social media is dedicated to it for weeks and then, after the vote, if the margin of winning candidates is large... nothing happens. If the margin is close or some folks feel the winning candidate is controversial there's comments about whether the daily emails and 60,000 social media impressions were enough.

Communication strategies are complicated and an area of professional competency even if lots of folks opine about it (just a different font). I'm not going to discuss communication in depth but will consider how complex a model is in relation to explaining it. This applies both to students and the institution for its oversight requirements.



Efficiency

Graham Smith discusses civic costs and avoiding burdensome bureaucracy.

In the models below I've tried to work in the boundaries of reasonable resources and capacity as well as structures that are accessible though obviously mileage may vary here between organisations. A staff member supporting each election candidate for 2 weeks is a great idea but not a feasible one.

On accessibility I'm assuming good faith on the details of the models - a requirement to vote only in person over a 1 hour period is clearly inaccessible as is referring to things as "plebiscites" so work would be needed to avoid these behaviours.



Transferability

Weight is given by Smith to models that can be transferred to different scales and contexts. This project is only looking at students' union elections held under the 1994 Education Act in relevant UK institutions.

However, the charitable purpose of most students' unions includes providing forums of discussion and debate for the "personal development" of students. Here then I think there is a value to consider if taking part in students' Union elections is useful for understanding the wider political landscape. Slates is an students union can be akin to political parties and the widespread use of transferable votes surely has helped significant numbers of graduates understand the limits of "first past the post" in general elections.

Length of course and type of student

For the sake of these models I've initially applied the theory to undergraduate courses of 3 year lengths. Don't write in - I know there are huge variances (almost all my family have done them) it's simply to test at this stage. Lots of aspects of the current systems don't quite fit for non traditional modes of study - a one years commuting masters student or someone expecting to spend a year away on placement. If you take time considering your own models you should think about the types of student at your own institution.



Student Leadership

In 1981 the TV show "Yes Minister" satirised a hospital that was a model of efficiency because it had no patients. It was clean, had well documented activity and always delivering strictly to budget. Increasingly I've seen discussions across the sector of how more efficient students' unions would be without students.

We could have board decisions without student leadership, only compliance oversight based on established models. No pesky sabbaticals who need support & training and have subjective views, only the pure logic of surveys and staff who are *always* objective. I've even occasionally had democracy staff bemoaning the difficulties of running elections and policy forums, presumably wishing only for the simplicity of unemployment. Joyous.

I am being facetious of course. Clearly there is messiness and difficulty in what students' unions do. There are times that we shouldn't solely rely on student input but as soon as we decide to remove officers or our members from structures completely I think we've probably forgotten the fundamentals. On that basis I've not considered anything which would fundamentally stop a union being student led. There's plenty of good folks in university student services that do things for students not with them and charity groups that provide activities and community building. All power to them, but we're more than that and richer for it.

The models

Process changes

There are some things that can be done via a change in process without any alterations of structures or governing documents (and hopefully bye-laws).

1. Train students in autumn not spring

Although less popular than they were, lots of unions or institutions do skills development sessions for students. In students' unions they are often targeted at election candidates and in the week between nomination and voting someone might have the opportunity to learn how to public speak or refine a manifesto. All well and good but this does mean only a small number of folks access this and they also don't get the time to imbed learning or practice it. Move it earlier helps people practice and be better candidates.

There's also more time for delivery as well as learning here. You can have more detail - using actual university meeting papers to explain what is used, analysing speeches that have been delivered and reviewing how well a campaigning activity went rather than just passing on theory is possible when talking about several hours of training not squeezing it into a few sessions the week after nominations close.

Often this training could be applicable across different groups and scaled up (indeed I'd argue that you need a fairly large group for public speaking to make the practice meaningful or else it isn't public enough). So let's make it for everyone, not just candidates. If someone goes through your training and doesn't run the worst that happens is that a skilled student who's engaged with your union is roaming around campus. What if people had the tools to be great leaders before they sat on a society committee? Or just saw this benefit from their union?

Appreciating there's no hidden bag of time & resource in most students' unions but lots will also be applicable across institutions. If you're in a city with other unions could you do things jointly? You'll need to tweak some areas but lots could be condensed. We fight apathy with a staircase rather than some Escheresque invention and could train it once.

Legislation	No expected impacts on status quo
Inclusiveness	Training over a longer period can be harder for students with part time jobs or caring responsibilities
Popular Control	No expected impacts on status quo
Considered Judgement	Training should improve candidate quality and include aspects of listening to a diversity of students
Transparency	No expected complications to explain the process
Efficiency	Requires staff capacity to deliver training if not currently undertaken in the students' union
Transferability	No expected impacts on status quo but skills learnt could be useful in other contexts

2. External training for candidates

As an organisation the union has to run impartial elections and rightly so. We're also in the odd place that staff are training the people who will later lead the organisation and direct activity while also not wanting to influence them unduly. Looking across unions I know there are some incredibly shrewd political operatives in staff roles - past officers or local councillors who take a step back 9-5. Both these things means that when training our own candidates in we're doing so with one hand tied behind our back - it's hard to be bold and neutral at the same time.

Could staff train candidates in other unions without these drawbacks? Sitting down with candidates and helping develop manifesto ideas fully, discussing what opponents goals are and where there can be collaboration or disagreement. Being more critical about promises we know aren't going anywhere.

For students' unions with a more traditional background this function often exists led by groups aligned to political parties or identities. This could level the field and improve the quality of candidates.

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Inclusiveness	Training over a longer period can be harder for students with part time jobs or caring responsibilities
Popular Control	No expected impacts on status quo
Considered Judgement	Training should improve candidate quality and include aspects of listening to a diversity of students
Transparency	No expected complications to explain the process
Efficiency	Costly to deliver
Transferability	No expected impacts on status quo but skills learnt could be useful in other contexts
Others	Danger of impartiality or mixture of quality across teams. Complaints may suggest the advice "wasn't good enough to win"

3. Participation points

Candidates should be putting their experience on campaign materials, but what if the students' Union supported this for voters to understand? I know some students' unions who give points for societies' engagement so let's do the same for individuals. Manifestos could come with a points score based on whether the individual has been a course rep, attended training (including that suggested in the above model) or helped out at RAG event.

You could even set a core level of "participation" points to allow candidature. No one can be on the ballot paper until they've completed 20 hours of volunteering, been to a union council and done an online powerpoint about leadership styles.

Legislation	No expected impacts on status quo unless completing points becomes a requirement to stand
Inclusiveness	Volunteering and engagement in students' union often harder for poorer and marginalised groups and this model would emphasis this disadvantage. If a base level of points are required to be a candidate this would be even greater
Popular Control	No expected impacts on status quo in terms of voting but there are issues with objectivity about the allocation of points, especially if a quota is required to stand.
Considered Judgement	Improves knowledge of candidates for electorate to be able to make a judgement
Transparency	Some additional requirement to explain the process
Efficiency	Requires minor staff capacity to run the points system
Transferability	No expected impacts on status quo
Others	Additional understanding is still required for the electorate – being President of the debate society could be more useful than being President of the Chess Club for officer roles

Structure changes

The 3 models above could be done by most unions with a bit of managerial agreement and maybe a heads up to the officer team or board. The following are more fundamental changes requiring significant rules changes (and perhaps approval by the King via the charity commission) and are far more likely to ruffle the feathers of a few roosting in the university governing body.

4. Elect teams not individuals

I'm often asked what I think about banning slates. The UN Declaration of Human Rights enshrines the freedom to organise and so I think we probably need to allow students to organise together. I also think it's a vital skill of being an officer - gaining support from allies in the student body and institution alike so let's reward rather than punish it.

So what if we leaned into the slate model? What if it was a requirement? What if we elected teams not individuals? Day one of officer training usually emphasises the fact they have collective responsibilities and need to work together so let's put this front and centre of the electorate's mind and get them to choose a team.

The union could encourage teams with diversity in them - actively demonstrating the breadth of student demographics and modes of study. A team purely of postgraduates or undergraduates would be unlikely to get broad support and would be a gamble but a more diverse team has a greater chance, especially with a transferable vote.

Teams can have more cohesive plans of work (I've lost count of folks all having a variance of "x issue" no matter what their role is) and again, this is about moving what happens in the summer behind doors out in front of the electorate.

The campaigning process could be designed to play to different strengths. There are benefits for having more introvert officers and a range of leadership styles. Not everyone has to give a winning 2 minute speech at hustings.

Legislation	The university would have to be happy that this is "fair and democratic"
Inclusiveness	There are risks to diversity especially if no teams try to be inclusive and it impacts individuals without a strong political network at the beginning of the nominations process
Popular Control	No expected impacts on status quo but the importance of transferable vote is increased
Considered Judgement	The model is better reflective of what happens in practice but also requires the electorate to consider team dynamics and interactions. Teams can be encouraged to explain how they meet a wide appeal for different types of students.
Transparency	Even within a party political system you vote for a single representative rather than a party block so this may take some explaining
Efficiency	No expected impacts on status quo
Transferability	The system does not commonly appear elsewhere but does emphasise the need for compromise in politics
Others	May increase campus tensions between groups of students especially across religious or political lines. Teams regularly fall out and there may be added issues for this happening during election periods.



5. Elect Council not officers

One different approach that has been mooted (and is present in other European countries such as Finland) is that student council could be considered major union office holders especially for larger institutions. The council election could be the main democratic event and you elect sabbaticals from among that student council.

It means that you could change some of the rules for the sabbatical positions compared from the status quo. If some of the council were international students for example then the contest between them for international students sabbatical might be voted for just by international students. This subsection of the student body aren't voting for someone to become a major union office holder (which is done by all students) but simply allocating the responsibilities among those already elected.

Legislation	The university would have to be happy that this is "fair and democratic" and a new definition of "major union office holders" applied
Inclusiveness	No expected impacts to status quo though you may need to reserve some council places for specific demographics.
Popular Control	No expected impacts to status quo though there would be a difference between choosing a council member and an officer and students could feasibly want someone to be one and definitely not the other
Considered Judgement	No expected impacts to status quo and having a smaller pool of candidates for sabbaticals who already have a mandate may be useful to clarify the choices
Transparency	Some minor additional communications required
Efficiency	Some additional operations required for the additional election processes
Transferability	This is a system used elsewhere in Europe

6. Sabbaticals choose Part Time Officers

Prime ministers choose their cabinets. Could something similar work in students' unions? Elect the full time positions as now but then get them to choose part time positions to work with them to fill gaps in diversity or skills. If you're concerned about nepotism in then student council could approve the appointments from the nominations of the sabbaticals.

Major union office holders are still elected by everyone but there's a chance for greater cohesion in the wider team.

Legislation	The university would have to be happy that this is "fair and democratic"
Inclusiveness	There are risks to diversity and this is unlikely to work if part time officers reflect liberation or other representation roles (which most do).
Popular Control	Appointment of part time officers is no longer directly elected
Considered Judgement	Electorate would need to understand appointment role and there's a risk of nepotism that increases marginalisation of some students
Transparency	Explaining the additional role of the sabbaticals to appoint would need explanation
Efficiency	No expected impacts on status quo
Transferability	There are similarities to appointment systems in parliament

7. Two year terms

Some students' unions in the past have elected sabbaticals for terms of 2 years rather than 1 and the open university have this now. Relatively often staff members ask my thoughts on this. From a union continuity standpoint it's a seductive model. Half the training, twice the continuity and double the development opportunities on the job. Universities too would probably like knowing there's someone in place for two annual cycles.

For member engagement it's a big issue. Halving the occasions that students can choose their leaders, halving the events that teach students about democracy, halving the opportunities to stand and yet keeping all the risks of Officer disengagement and disillusion doesn't seem ideal. It would be legally valid as a model I think, but apart from the open university there are significant things to consider.

Legislation	The university would have to be happy that this is "fair and democratic"
Inclusiveness	Halves the opportunities for students to be involved and prolongs the time a demographic isn't reflected in their leadership. 1 year courses may be disenfranchised from their union
Popular Control	Halves the opportunities for students to choose their leaders which reduces member control
Considered Judgement	Increases onus on students for the years they can vote to make a good decision. Officers elected may not be equipped for the challenges needed 18 months after appointment or want to face them
Transparency	No expected impact on the status quo but students may expect to be able to elect leaders each year and be unsure why they cannot
Efficiency	Halves number of elections required
Transferability	One year terms are an unusual quirk of students' unions compared to other organisations so this may better reflect most other experiences
Others	There are continuity gains for the union and institution

8. One Sabbatical, termly paid executives

One for smaller unions here. We want to engage a wide number of students in our leadership structures but where positions are limited so might this ambition. If there's not really a capacity to support more than a handful of volunteers then maybe the answer is to shorten length of office. Sabbaticals still run for a year with the skills development and relationship building those roles but you could reach 18 volunteers rather than 6 if they were in post for a term rather than a year.

After they finish? If not re-elected you have experienced students who can help support campaigns, be course representatives or help run projects of work.

Legislation	The university would have to be happy that this is "fair and democratic"
Inclusiveness	Increases opportunities to elect and run
Popular Control	Increases opportunities to elect and also has a built in recall mechanism
Considered Judgement	Could adapt to rapidly changing circumstances but very poor model for longer term planning
Transparency	High communications workload with regular elections
Efficiency	Higher workload for election supporting staff and returning officers
Transferability	No expected impacts
Others	High onus on induction and training of representatives

9. Vetting for skills and diversity

Around 50% of students' unions appoint rather than elect the students who sit on their boards. This usually comes following an interview and assessment process based on skills and diversity against the board's needs. Student councils may then approve the nominations. Doing it for other roles is certainly a possibility.

Outside of elections there is usually a set of directive work for officers to do within policy from councils or other forum. A strategic plan (if properly consulted with members) should also reflect what students need so you could assess candidates against these goals. The members still get a say but the nominations list is drawn up by a committee of students on this basis.

Instead of or alongside the skills you could apply diversity data to the candidates. Over a 3 year period you could ensure that the nominations reflected the student body. In a group of 5 sabbaticals if one year there's two defining as LGBT then that's the quota for another 2 years but equally you can know that at least 7 of them will be women.

Legislation	The university would have to be happy that this is "fair and democratic".
Inclusiveness	Vetting based on skills can lead to monocultures and reducing the pool to "people who think like us" on strategies or goals. On the diversity vetting model, in theory every gets included but you may not see this if you are on a shorter course. It may lead to not having the right people in place at the right time (an all white sabbatical team during the "Black Lives Matter" movement)
Popular Control	Electorate choice is reduced (though possibly for greater representation of some characteristics when vetted for diversity). There are fewer opportunities for candidates to stand in some cases, especially due to unfortunate timing
Considered Judgement	Electorate choice is reduced and so judgement for the electorate is diminished
Transparency	The model would need additional communication
Efficiency	Some additional administration for diversity monitoring
Transferability	The model is not common elsewhere as such though plenty of political parties choose who goes ahead to the electorate
Others	Who does the vetting? How do you act objectively for skills?

Old rules but tweaked

As I highlighted earlier, these are initial ideas for new models that could be done while still legal and keeping fundamentals of student leadership within our unions. At no point do I think I have the answer that the sector has been missing all these years – I don't think there necessarily is one. I'm always slightly nervous about folks seeing something that looks shiny elsewhere and applying it unchanged to their context so do watch that.

However trying to look from new perspectives is rewarding and even without seismic change you may find a few things are of specific use within the models above or things you've thought of yourself. Maybe you don't re-elect part time officers each term, but could you do a day of training for them 3 times a year to improve engagement? Checking in on the skills of officers over several years might identify where staff support or induction training is needed ("we never get meeting skills right") even if you don't vet for them.

Take a day or two away from the everyday to grab flipchart, coffee and space and think through something new.

Existing models you may have missed...

As well as presenting new models I wanted to bring attention to some unusual models that you may have missed from the students' unions of Bedfordshire, Liverpool Guild and Loughborough

What I haven't done here is assess them against the same criteria as the hypothetical models. This is for the simple reason that at the time of writing I've not been able to chat to the unions involved and so give a fair picture of their reflections. Maybe this will be an addendum to the document in the future but for now I've just tried to report objectively on these approaches.

Campus Points

Bedfordshire university students' union have a large number of campuses. They use a voting system where each campus is given a number of campus points. Students on each campus vote for candidates as usual but in essence this becomes 7 smaller election processes. The candidates get a number of points based on their popularity at that campus based on a single transferable vote system.

For example, a campus may have 4 points available and 1,000 students. This means 250 votes equals a "campus point". In an election where there are 5 candidates, Candidate A received 400 votes, Candidates B and C receive 200 votes and candidate D receives 100 and candidate E gets 50 in the first round. Candidate A gets 1 campus point and candidate E is eliminated.

The votes are reallocated using alternative transferable vote and the quota needed for campus points reduces as the number of transfers goes down (for example if only 2/3rds of students used a second preference the quota for a campus point would reduce by 1/3rd).

Elect Officers not positions

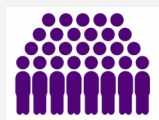
Hat tip to Liverpool Guild who I believe started this off. Essentially you elect your sabbaticals without portfolio [through](#) the transferable vote method. The candidate who first meets the quota with the highest number of votes meeting quorum is the first choice for president (though may decline it for someone else). The importance of the single transferable vote (rather than alternative transferable vote which is what is usually used for sabbatical elections) is really important here.

The portfolio of work is created by your manifesto. That means that someone might run on a "pure" welfare area of work but could combine access to sexual health with improved volunteer accreditation and better publicity of democratic events.

Elected sabbaticals and appointed "community leaders"

Much has been written over the years about the difference between officers who have a portfolios that are purely representative and those who *deliver* services in the context of a student led organisation. Some larger, older students' unions elect roles such as a full time RAG officer or a newspaper editor who are more about project delivery than representing a view.

Loughborough students union mixes elected [sabbatical officers](#) with one year [community leads](#) who give insights and help coordinate roles for a one year position. These work within the strategic plan of the students' union with a connection to the democracy and communities sabbatical officer.



Services to Students' Unions

Officer and Trustee Training

Officer and Student Trustee Induction

Using my experience of supporting Trustee boards, my course focuses on confidence and skills building as well as understanding the roles and responsibilities of the position. Working alongside staff, dealing with complexity and operating within the SU's member led values are all covered.

This day long course runs in your union and is tailored to your needs.

Organisational Power

As a University manager I watched student officer attend meetings and, purely because they didn't understand the power dynamics, fail to make their points. This training looks at the power structures of the university and the key individuals who must be identified and lobbied to make change. It will discuss the techniques officers need to consider to get the most out of meetings including preparation and tracking follow up. Outside of meetings it will look at how individuals can be influenced informally.

This day long course runs in your union and is tailored to your needs.

Being a students' union Trustee Chair

This training is focused on the issues faced by SU Trustee Board Chairs who are student officers. Recruiting and developing the other board members, managing political tensions and leading on ensuring papers are clear and accessible often come under a Chair's role.

This £250 course is a made up of 4 online webinars plus 1-2-1 coaching. [Sign up here.](#)

Staff Training

Governance for Students' Union Managers

Delivered with Jacqui Clements, this course gives SU managers the skills they need to support their boards, understanding the context of legislation as well as how to prepare papers, support the chair and balance help Trustees deal with complex situations.

The course is made up of 4 seminars, an action learning set and coaching spread over 6 months and is delivered in cohorts of up to 10 from across the SU sector, giving a strong networking opportunity.

Operational Reviews

Trustee, Officer and Democracy Reviews

Combining my experience of students' unions and the Higher Education sector with my training in charity law and governance, I offer reviews of all students' union leadership and decision making operations. Always member led and my reviews offer pragmatic but innovative solutions tailored to individual client needs rather than presuming sector trends.

"Thank you for the thoughtfulness, consideration and thoroughness of your report - genuinely a joy to read and it is already proving to be hugely beneficial in developing our organisation's conversations... and finding ways through in this journey of reviewing and changing our structures"

For more details you can contact me using [this form](#) or the QR code



Nick Smith

Nick has almost twenty years' experience of supporting leaders, volunteers and staff in charities and higher education institutions with a particular expertise in governance and democratic processes. Though based in London his SU clients stretch across the UK and North America.

His work developing the model governing documents for students' unions was used as an example of good practice in the House of Lords. He has an excellent understanding of the challenges facing SUs of all sizes as campaigning, representative and service delivery organisations. He is company secretary of five students' unions giving him a pragmatic experience to live issues faced by student representative groups.

He has been an executive officer within a leading UK medical school and assistant registrar for governance at Queen Mary University of London. In these roles he developed an understanding of universities and their internal processes and perceptions of students' unions.

He was awarded a distinction (84%) in the Chartered Governance Institute's certificate in Charity Law & Governance and is an [Advance HE associate](#). He writes a regular [Wonkhe column](#).

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