

## Society Governance Review

### **Purpose:**

The Student Activities Department has conducted a review into how societies are set up and governed. The review set out to re-evaluate existing bye laws for societies and propose changes based on research and student feedback. We researched options via online surveys, at society forums and by researching practices at other Students' Unions.

The review looked into various aspects of society governance, from an executive structure to committee member roles and memberships.

The review will be set out according to each aspect of society governance that we assessed and the reasoning behind any changes proposed in that area.

**The Executive Committee is asked to approve these proposed changes.**

### Changes to Bye Laws

#### **Current model:**

- **Two Bye Laws relating to Clubs and Societies and Forum. (Bye Law 3 and Bye Law 5)**
- **Multiple other documents relating to conduct and governance of societies**

There is currently two Bye Laws relating to Clubs and Societies. Bye Law 3 focuses on Clubs and Societies Forum and Bye Law 5 relates to the governance of Clubs and Societies. These Bye Laws are very strict and provide a lot of specific operational details for running societies, e.g. how many committee members are needed to run a society and how many members are needed to access the grants. This Bye Law is also dated in that it mentions the Experience Officers and a Societies Rep, roles that we no longer use.

This document provides an outline to all of the changes to society governance that we have outlined, but we have made changes overall to the Bye Laws which encompassed these guidelines.

#### **Proposed model:**

- **One Bye Law for Societies – Bye Law 5**

- **More expansive Societies Handbook**

We propose that there is one bye law for societies, known as Bye Law 5 which relates to Societies. We have worked hard to reduce the amount of operational content in this Bye Law as we have found that although it provides clear rules, some of these rules are extremely detailed and the department are not able to adapt as quickly to issues as we need to.

We propose then, that the content of the Bye Law is reduced significantly and that only the key details of the rules are included. The operational matters of these rules would be detailed further in the Societies Handbook.

We propose that the Societies Handbook becomes the document that provides the supplementary details of the Societies Bye Law and references all of the relevant policies relating to societies, e.g. Associate Membership, Guest Speaker, Grants Funding.

By reducing the content of the Societies Bye Law and supplementing the further details in a handbook, we are able to adapt more quickly to changes and trends relating to societies. This move also gives more power to the Student Activities Department to respond to issues and we hope by having a clearer Bye Law, more societies will be aware of the absolute guidelines they need to follow to be an affiliated society.

We appreciate society members may take issue with giving the Student Activities Department more power over the Bye Law. To ease their concerns, we plan to have the Handbook discussed and voted on at Society Forum. Staff would be responsible for keeping the Handbook up to date, but any changes to content or policies would be discussed and agreed at Societies Forum.

An example of the difference in Bye Law content is included below and the previous Bye Laws and our proposed Bye Law 5 are included in the appendices of this document.

- ▲ **2. Society Forum**
- 2.1 There will be a regular Society Forum that shall be the platform for feedback and discussion for all Union-affiliated Societies.
  - 2.2 Further details regarding the function of the Society Forum will be outlined in the Society Handbook.
  - 2.3 The Society Forum may refuse affiliation for proposed groups on grounds outlined in the affiliation section of the Societies Handbook.
  - 2.4 Appeals should be submitted to the Executive Committee. The decision of the Executive Committee is final.

Figure 1: The Forum section of the newly proposed Bye Law 5. Bye Law 3 was originally a two page document dedicated to Forum, it is now this part of an overall Societies Bye Law.

### Society Membership Costs and Branding

#### Current model:

- **Annual memberships only**
- **Minimum charge for societies and clubs**

Memberships to societies run in line with the academic year. Memberships are available from 1<sup>st</sup> August and expire on the 31<sup>st</sup> July the following year.

Societies and recreational sport clubs must charge a minimum membership fee for the year. This fee is £3.60 for societies (including VAT) and £3 for sport clubs. Sports club members must also pay an annual fee of £5 for Activities Insurance, meaning that once this fee is paid, they are insured for any of our sports clubs they join that year.

#### Proposed changes:

- **Societies and Sports Societies**
- **Semester Memberships**
- **Free societies**

#### Societies and Sports Societies:

The Students' Union are responsible for Recreational Sport while the University's Sport department are responsible for Competitive Sport Clubs. We propose removing the term clubs and running all groups under the banner of Societies to provide a clearer distinction between SU affiliated groups and University Sport-led Sports Clubs.

Sports Clubs would be known as Sports Societies. All aspects of running a sports club within the SU would remain the same, only the naming and branding of these groups would be different.

### **Semester Memberships:**

As a Students' Union, we are conscious that we have a number of international students studying for one semester and many new starters who join us in January. In January 2018, around 700 students joined ARU. We also have a number of students studying on placement courses, particularly on our Chelmsford campus, meaning that they are off-campus for a large part of a semester.

With these students in mind, we proposed a change to club and society memberships. We propose that societies and clubs provide an annual membership and a semester based membership, meaning that students who can only join for one semester or who will be arriving later in the year will get better value for money and we hope, will be more likely to join societies as they do not feel they have to pay for a full year when they can only benefit from a semester of activity. Memberships would still expire on the 31<sup>st</sup> July as normal.

In January 2018, our Student Activities Manager visited Hertfordshire Students' Union to discuss society governance and semester based memberships with their VP Activities. Herts SU also use MSL and have adopted a semester based approach for memberships and had positive success in this area. This helped us to work out how we would deliver this model at ARU Students' Union.

### **Free societies:**

With regards to charging a minimum membership fee, we do not propose this changes for our sports clubs. Sports clubs are expensive to run and the committee need to keep the club sustainable if they wish to train regularly.

For some societies however, we propose that they may not charge a membership fee if there is good reason. For example, our Student Minds society runs peer support groups for students suffering ill mental health and we feel it would be appropriate for membership to this society to be free of charge.

The terms and conditions of not charging for society membership would be:

- The committee must have a valid reason for not wishing to charge for membership.
- The committee must meet with the Student Activities Department to discuss free membership prior to society memberships going live on the 1<sup>st</sup> August.
- The society would be limited at how much they could apply for in the Grants Funding.

These requests would be taken on a case by case basis and approved at the discretion of the Student Activities Department.

In researching other Students' Unions, we found many allowed free society memberships but it depended on the society's aims and activities. For example, KCLSU, Sheffield SU and Cardiff SU all have a large number of active fundraising and volunteering based societies that do not charge for membership but more interest based and recreational societies do charge for membership.

For some organisations, such as Bangor Students' Union, the University provided greater funding in the block grant to allow the Students' Union to render all memberships free.

### Setting Up and Running Societies

#### **Current model:**

- **3 committee members needed**
- **15 paid members**

A group currently needs 3 core student committee members and 15 paid members in order to be an affiliated society with the Students' Union. These 15 members can include the committee and the committee roles must be President, Treasurer and Administrator.

#### **Proposed model:**

- **2 committee members needed**
- **15 paid members**

#### **Paid Members:**

After researching across the sector, we found there was no clear trend in how many members and committee members were required to run a society. KCLSU and Warwick asked for over 30 interested members, UEA and Aberdeen requested 20 interested members while Teeside, Northumbria and Aberystwyth asked for 10 members. As a result of this research, we decided not to change the number of members needed to run a society, as we believed any fewer than 15 members and it would be hard to ensure that grants funding was benefiting a large number of students.

#### **Committee Members:**

With regards to committee members, Students' Unions across the sector asked for between 2 and 5 students to act as committee members. The sector was consistent however in that that the core committee roles all involved President and Treasurer positions.

After our committee elections in March, we noted that of our 119 groups, 80% were able to fill their committee while the remainder struggled to fill these core roles. We also noted an increase in disagreements between committee members based on members not fulfilling their roles.

We propose to move to having only a President and Treasurer needed to set up and run a society. We would still continue to suggest societies find themselves a third committee member to help with the administration of the society, but we believe that between the President and the Treasurer, the main running requirements of the society would still be met.

We have also done work on clarifying the expectations of these roles and supporting societies to write role descriptions for any additional roles they plan to fill. Committee members would also need to sign and agree their role descriptions at the beginning of the year, meaning there would be more accountability if a committee member does not fulfil their role.

### **Societies Forum**

#### **Current model:**

- **Once a month**
- **Campus-specific**
- **Voting in person**
- **Led by Student Activities staff**
- **Used mostly for news and updates**

Societies Forum takes place once a month on each campus and all committee members are asked to attend. Previously, Forum was led by the Experience Officer and then the Activities Officer. Following the changes to Full-time Officer roles, Student Activities staff then began leading Forum.

The main actions currently are to provide updates and news relating to societies and to gather feedback from committee members.

#### **Proposed model:**

- **Once a month**
- **Campus specific (with a cross campus social media group)**
- **Led by an elected student chair**
- **Voting online**
- **More decision making abilities**

We propose that the regularity and location of Forum does not change, we think it is important to keep it campus specific as this allows us to run Forum at times that suit the students of each campus. We have however introduced a cross campus committee member group on social media that students can join and will be introducing a cross campus newsletter that they can engage with so we can build a community for committee members.

### **Elected Student Chair:**

Prior to the changes to the Officer roles, the Activities or Executive Officer would have led Forum. This has fallen to Student Activities staff since but we feel that by being staff-led, there is less room for organic discussion. In researching other Students' Unions, we found a number of different models for society discussion which all had varied levels of responsibility.

For example, UEA SU, Lancaster SU, City University SU and Sheffield SU all run a Societies Executive made up of volunteers and an officer, who discuss new group affiliations, funding requests and updates. These groups are made up of a small population of society committee members.

We also spoke with Leeds Beckett SU regarding their structure for society feedback. For their groups, they run a Societies Forum every 2 weeks which discusses new society applications.

In asking our committee members what they would like Forum to look like and who would run it, we had a lot of differing responses. Some respondents wanted a Societies Executive Committee while others wanted a Society Forum chaired by a Full-time Officer or an elected student Chair.

In reviewing these ideas, we looked at similar models that currently exist within the Students' Union and discussed the benefits and drawbacks of these models. We found that in creating a Society Exec, we would need a number of our voluntary society committee members to take on additional voluntary roles within the Societies Exec. We were

concerned at the additional workload this would give to our volunteers and also worried that by replacing a Forum space where all society members and committee members could attend with a smaller committee, we would not get the same engagement with the society community.

We propose then to keep Societies Forum but with clear changes to the model to increase engagement and the quality of feedback and discussion. We propose that Forum is led by an Elected Forum Chair, a voluntary role that can be undertaken for the academic year. To reduce the demand on the student volunteer, Student Activities staff will remain responsible for the administrative tasks of Forum.

Members of the Student Activities department would put the call out for agenda items, compile and circulate the agendas and take and share minutes. The Student Activities Department would also be responsible for putting any polls or voting items online.

The Elected Student Chair would also be invited to attend Grants Committee.

### **Forum Responsibilities:**

Forum is a space for committee members to provide feedback but much of the time it relies on providing updates and news. We propose that going forward, the responsibilities of Forum are made clearer to student committee members and society members.

We propose that Forum does the following:

- Discusses new and returning society affiliations – if rejecting an affiliation, the society would then appeal to the Executive Committee who have the final decision
- Provides updates on society matters and discuss opportunities for collaboration
- Notes grant funding outcomes
- Provides feedback on proposed changes to society related policies and governance

We propose to elect a current committee member at the first forum of the academic year to act as Forum Chair and lead the Society Forums for the year. The election would take place online, voting would be done by secret ballot and students would have at least 48 hours to vote.

### **Online Voting:**

The current Forum model does not often vote on matters relating to societies. Instead, committee members only use their voting power at Student Council. We propose that more items are taken to Forum for voting purposes and that voting is held online for at least 24 hours after the meeting. We do not propose that items that would go to Student Council would be voted on at Forum, instead it would be items relating to Student Activities.



Items that would be voted upon at Forum:

- Voting on whether to deny affiliation to a new or returning society
- Voting on policy changes in the Society Handbook
- Voting on changes that relate to Societies

Notes on changes voted on at Forum would then be shared with Student Council. We hope that by providing more power at Forum, our Committee Members would feel more empowered in their roles and it would make them more confident in using their voting rights at Student Council.

We have included a screenshot below of the Student Council voting page, we would replicate this for Society Forum.



## Student Council - 25 April 2018

Voting will be open until 8:00pm on 26 April 2018



The large number in the box is the majority of either "for" (thumbs up) or "against" (thumbs down).

The small number is the total number of voters.

### Executive Officer reports

Your Executive Officers are elected to represent you. Are you happy with what they're doing? Is there something else you want them to work on? Let them know.

New Idea



 **57**   
59 voters

**President**

Submitted 1 month ago by [Democracy Admin](#) Current

[Edit](#)

0 comments



 **46**   
54 voters

**Vice President (Health, Social Care, Education and Medical Science)**

Submitted 1 month ago by [Emma Howes](#) Current

[Edit](#)

0 comments

 **46**   
52 voters

**Vice President (Science and Technology)**

Submitted 1 month ago by [Emma Howes](#) Current

[Edit](#)

0 comments

Figure 2: The voting page for Student Council. For Forum, staff will post items as ideas and committee members will then have 48 hours to vote the item up or down.

## **Grant Funding**

### **Current model:**

- **2 – 3 times a year (depending on funds leftover)**
- **15 members needed to apply**
- **Restricted to specific categories**
- **Grants committee with staff and Full-time Officers**

Grants funding is currently open to societies and clubs with at least 15 paid members on the system. The funding is open 2-3 times a year, depending on remaining funds. There are two pots per campus, one for societies and one for sports clubs. There are 8 categories that groups can apply for funding in, such as Guest Speakers, Health and Safety and Equipment. Once the deadline to apply for funding has closed, the Student Activities team and a Full Time Officer will hold a committee to decide funding for groups. This committee is open to all student committee members to attend but is not widely attended by students.

### **Proposed model:**

- **2 – 3 times a year (depending on funds leftover)**
- **15 members needed to apply**
- **Restricted amount available for free societies**
- **Ability to transfer between categories**
- **Grants committee with Elected Forum Chair**
- **More training for writing Grant applications**

### **Grants committee:**

In researching other Students' Unions, we found that most organisations using a Societies Executive Committee would have this group review funding applications for societies. A member of Student Activities staff visited UEASU to view how a Societies Executive worked and how funding requests were processed.

We also surveyed our committee members to ask who they felt should attend these funding meetings and we were surprised to find that committee members did not express a desire to attend these meetings.

As we have decided not to create a Societies Executive Committee, we felt it would be best to keep the Grants Committee separate. However, to ensure there is greater transparency for committee members, the elected Forum Chair would attend alongside a Full-time Officer and Student Activities staff.

Funding outcomes would also be discussed at Societies Forum, and we hope this will improve understanding of what Grants Funding is and how applications are approved. We also plan to run more in-depth training sessions for writing applications.

### **Frequency and minimum membership:**

We do not propose to change the frequency and structure of the funding pots (2 per campus for sport and societies) and we propose to keep the required 15 members needed to access the funding. We decided to keep the 15 members because on average, a society will have 3 committee members who all should be paid members of the society, meaning they only need 12 students to join the society to be able to access funding. We feel that allowing societies funding when they have less than 15 members would mean that they funding is not actually benefiting as many students as possible and could be better spent with a larger society.

We will ensure however that new societies starting receive a small start-up fund to help them raise awareness of their group.

### **Categories:**

Grants are currently split into eight categories and there have previously been limitations on transferring funds allocated in one category to another. We propose to allow the transfer of funds between categories and extensions to funding deadlines on a case by case basis with approval from the Student Activities Manager.

For free societies, we propose that we would limit the funding available to their society through the Grants but this would be done based on the quality of their application and how many students would be benefited by the funding.

### **Associate Membership:**

#### **Current model:**

- **15 members needed to apply**
- **Online application**
- **Endorsement needed**

- **Must bring value to the group**

Societies are currently able to have one Associate Member for every fifteen paid student members. Associate members must apply online and there must be an endorsing committee member from the group named in the application. Associate members should highlight why they want to join the group and what they will bring to the group.

#### **Proposed model:**

- **10 members needed to apply**
- **Online application**
- **Endorsement needed**
- **Over 18s only**
- **No priority for members of the community**

In conversations with our student committee members, we found that many students from partner colleges were expressing an interest in joining societies, but the 15:1 ratio was quite high.

In reviewing the policy, we decided to implement a new ratio of 10 paid student members for every 1 associate member.

We propose that the online application and endorsement requirement remain the same but we will require that associate members are over 18 and priority will be given to alumni, ARU or SU staff, students from partner colleges and other HE establishments rather than members of the public.

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