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INSTITUTE

Towards a Better Student Democracy: How to Improve the Student Motion System at EUSA.

[August, 2021: Student Democracy Research Programme]

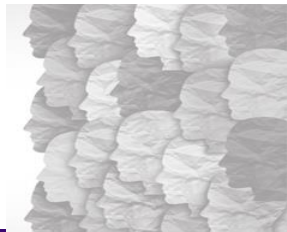




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Foreword

This policy research paper was produced by a group of students within the Buchanan Institute as part of the 2021 Summer Research Programme.

The Buchanan Institute is a University of Edinburgh-based student-led think-tank that empowers students with the ability to develop policy that will solve real-world problems. By conducting policy research on specific issues, Buchanan's members aim to turn diverse ideas into comprehensive action.

The Buchanan Institute Summer Research Programme, separate from its Academic year Research Programme, was borne amid the first UK lockdown in 2020 out of a desire to provide an opportunity for students left suddenly without work experience and internships to continue to engage in public policy during an unprecedented time. In a time where many students felt abandoned or forgotten, it was more important than ever that students had the necessary tools and knowledge to make their voices heard.

This year brings the Summer Research Programme closer to home by centring the research topics on The University of Edinburgh, bringing back the focus on a familiar landscape. Through this latest instalment of the Programme, we hope to continue helping the next generation of young adults to engage with the public sphere.

Lila Sakata and Nadja Chong,

Research Directors at the Buchanan Institute



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We would also like to thank our two interviewees - Scott Quinn and Michael Hewitson. They both freely gave up their time to help with this project and they both provided valuable insight which helped shape the direction of this report.



Executive Summary

There is currently a lack of engagement with the student motion system (SMS) at the University of Edinburgh, both in terms of proposing motions and voting on them. This lack of engagement was displayed in our survey, which found that 75% of student participants did not know how the SMS works.

In brief, the SMS operates in the following way. A motion is proposed by a student to induce a response by EUSA, such as lobby the university or initiate a campaign. When a student proposes a motion, it is discussed and voted on at the student council – composed of EUSA officers and student reps, as well as the general student population who wish to attend. Motions with 67% or more support at the student council are passed.

This report recommends five policy proposals to address the limited engagement of the student body with this system.

- Firstly, EUSA must employ a more effective marketing scheme for their system.
- Secondly, the language surrounding the SMS must be changed to make the process more accessible to students.
- Thirdly, EUSA must ensure that all students wishing to propose a motion are provided mentorship by a member of staff to ensure the SMS is equally and easily accessible throughout the student body.
- Fourthly, improved feedback mechanisms from participants who were involved with the SMS need to be instilled so that the system can be continually honed to meet the needs of students.
- Lastly, the EUSA website formatting must be improved to ensure information about the SMS is easily accessible.

Moreover, this paper proposes that in the long run EUSA must consider establishing a randomly selected jury of students to be decision-makers on policy. Overall, we suggest that through increasing student participation our proposals will improve the democratic legitimacy of the SMS and mean the SMS is better suited to achieving policy outcomes that benefit the student population at large.



Key Recommendations

- EUSA must employ a more effective marketing strategy for the student motion system to spread awareness and encourage participation. This could include a rebranding of EUSA and sustained effort towards promotion of this.
- EUSA must change their language to be more accessible, approachable and less regimented. They should move away from NUS formal debate procedure and focus on clarity.
- Feedback mechanisms need to be improved and instilled by EUSA, to ensure consistent feedback from participants and continual improvement of the system. More frequent online surveys should be instilled.
- A member of EUSA staff should work closely with students throughout the process of drafting their proposal to maximise ease of use. EUSA staff should be available to offer close support to people with little understanding of the process.
 - EUSA should improve the formatting of their website to ensure accessibility. A clear section should be dedicated to the SMS with a visual aid, and inclusivity and diversity should be outlined online.



Introduction

The current EUSA motion system allows students to submit two types of proposals: ordinary motions, and extraordinary motions. Ordinary motions set Student's Association policy and require the drafter to collect 20 student signatures before submission. Alternatively, extraordinary motions concern amending democratic regulations and require 40 student signatures (EUSA Student Council Guide 2020).

The current system requires the motion proposer to submit actions that are 'specific, measurable, realistic, and have a clear time scale' (EUSA Submit a Motion, 2021). They are also encouraged to include any statistics relating to the issue, related past motions, or current related work being undertaken by the Association or University as part of the motions background. The student is then able to express their motivations for the proposal. The submission of motions is to be completed in bullet points.

During the 2020/2021 academic year, 14 motions were discussed at student council (EUSA Student Council Archive 2021). All 14 motions passed with an average of 95% voting in favour. However, these high numbers only account for those who voted. In November 2020, 36 of 61 elected representatives voted on the month's proposed motions. In contrast, by March 2021, only 23 ballots were cast by elected reps. Engagement from these 61 elected posts ranged from 37.7% to 60.7% across the year.

Between January and March 2019, an average of 88 ballots were cast at student council from a combination of both students and elected reps (EUSA Student Council Archive 2021). As in subsequent years, numbers varied month to month, with a high of 128 in January and low of 46 in February. Elected reps had an average turnout of 38 across these three months. During this period, 12 motions were brought forth, with all but one passing at student council. The one remaining motion was referred to an online ballot.

Due to time constraints in March 2021, four proposed motions were not discussed at student council. All four were extraordinary motions concerning EUSA democratic reform. To determine what motions would be discussed at the March 2021 meeting, elected reps were asked in advance to rank all eight motions on a priority ballot. This was designed to narrow down a top five, but due to amendments on the Support for Student Sex Workers motion, only four motions were ultimately debated (EUSA Student Council Archive 2021).

With a student population of 44,510 in the 2019/20 year (University of Edinburgh 2020), these voting statistics are not reflective of the entire student body.

Research Methods

Student Council Papers

We reviewed student council papers to gather initial findings on the current practices adopted by EUSA's SMS. This involved collecting data from meetings held in 2019, 2020 and 2021. This helped form the basis for our preliminary suggestions, which went on to guide our final policy recommendations.

Survey

In order to gauge intel into the preferences and opinions of students regarding EUSA's motion system, we decided to conduct primary research through a survey.

We used the software Qualtrics to produce our survey. It used skip-logic, so that we could use one survey link whilst targeting three different sampling populations. This works by only showing the respondent the appropriate questions depending upon their answers. For example, students who had never participated in or were not a member of EUSA (non-EUSA students) at the University of Edinburgh were shown different questions to those who are a member of EUSA (EUSA students).

Strengths & Drawbacks

The strengths of our survey included anonymity, closed and open-ended questions, and the option for follow-up interviews. As our survey was totally anonymous, we considerably reduced the possibility of collecting socially desirable answers, thus enhancing the validity of our data. Closed questions allowed us to increase survey participation rates, as well as establishing patterns and trends with ease during data analysis. Open questions and our 'any other comments' option gave greater flexibility to the respondent, allowing them to provide key insights to our research.

Potential drawbacks to our survey include a limited sample size. We collected 70 completed responses in total, which may not be fully representative of our sampling population. Also, we relied on snowball sampling to distribute our survey. Therefore, our sample may be relatively consistent with our own demographics in terms of age, university etc.



Demographics

Age

We used more age brackets for younger age groups and grouped more ages together in larger brackets for older age gaps. This was because we felt that we would have more responses from younger age groups and thus it would be more useful to see the variance in this section of results. This was because Edinburgh University students tend to be young people. We felt it prudent to see which groups would respond to our survey and whether awareness of EUSA would vary much throughout one's years at university.

Degree Type

We were interested to see whether members of certain schools or degree types would be more likely to engage in and participate with EUSA and/or our survey. We were conscious of getting participants outside of the School of Social and Political Science.

Interviews

We conducted interviews to supplement our knowledge of the student motion system at Edinburgh, and compare and contrast this against similar university democratic systems across the UK. We also used interviews to follow up on data provided by the survey.

We interviewed EUSA's Democracy and Campaigns Coordinator, Scott Quinn, to clarify current EUSA practice and discuss areas for potential reform within existing EUSA frameworks.

Leeds University Union (LUU) was selected on the basis of its high rates of general satisfaction to ensure that our research drew on best practice (Bates, 2018). Our interview with LUU's Democratic Engagement Manager, Michael Hewitson (2021), therefore helped to identify areas in which to focus our final recommendations.

EUSA's Website

We determined from our primary research that a large issue with the EUSA student motion system was accessibility. As the EUSA website is the main reference point for information about the system, we decided to investigate here. Therefore, part of our secondary research was to conduct content analysis on the websites of the top five performing Student Unions in the UK and compare that with EUSA's page.

Discussion

Survey Results

Demographics

Age

Our most popular age demographic was 20-21 with 63% of participants falling in this category. Our least popular age was 45+ (Figure 1).

Gender

The most common gender was by far female, followed by male. A few respondents preferred not to say and some didn't identify with any of our pre-selected options (Figure 2).

Ethnicity

Our respondents came from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, but the majority identified as white/white British. We think this graph captures the range of ethnicities participating in our survey, whilst also showing that it was weighted towards a generally White demographic (Figure 3).

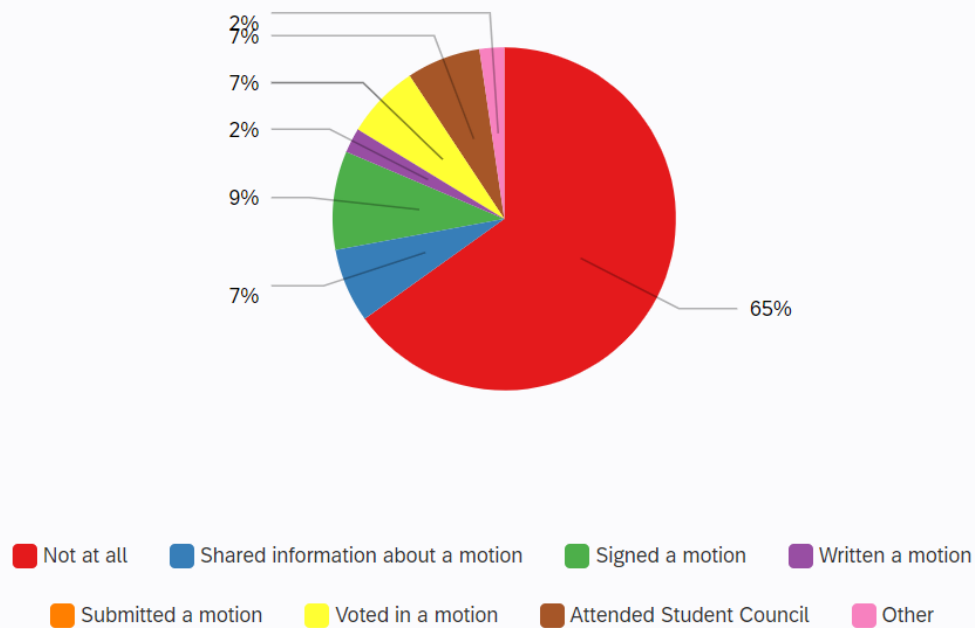
Degree type

Respondents were varied in their degree type (Figure 4).

When asked: '*To what extent have you participated in the student motion system? (Select all that apply)*', respondents gave the following answers:

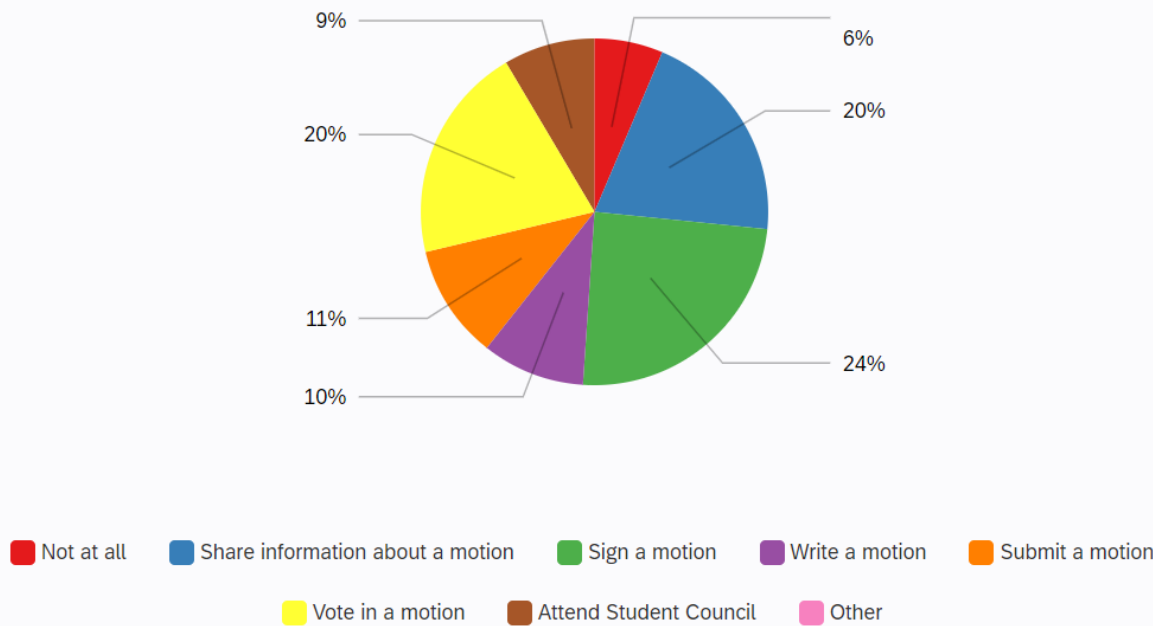


Q7 - To what extent have you participated in the student motion system (select all that apply)



When asked: ‘To what extent would you participate in the Student Motion process? (Select all that apply),’ respondents stated:

Q8 - To what extent would you participate in the student motion system (select all that apply)



This is a really interesting contradiction, because it shows that there is a clear demand from students to be engaged on campus however this is not matched with actual levels of participation. This relationship is discussed in greater depth in the legitimacy and participation section of the brief. There is clearly a problem with accessibility here.

When asked: ‘What do you think a good student motion system offers?’ students' answers were along the lines of accessibility, opportunities to attempt change, ease, clarity, inclusivity, impartiality and legitimacy. Evidently, these responses, combined with our background research, were compelling enough to be opportunities for change within the SMS.

Further key survey results include:

- 86% of students didn't know how to vote in a motion
- 72% of respondents were students at the University of Edinburgh who did not participate in EUSA.
- 21% of respondents were participants/ former participants in EUSA
- 7% were students at other Universities.
- 76% of respondents did not know how the motion process at EUSA works, 11% did and 13% were unsure
- Once explained what the motion system was, 80% of students were content. When those who said they weren't satisfied were prompted, they offered answers along the lines of brevity, lack of awareness, little input by student body, overly complex
- 67% of respondents rated the Student Motion system at 3 stars, with the remaining 33% rating it 4 stars.
- When asked how the motion system could be improved, answers were along the lines of by becoming more accessible, increasing debate on motions, and increasing awareness. Increased awareness came up 20 times out of the 29 participants who provided a written response.

Interview Findings

In our interview with EUSA's Democracy and Campaigns Coordinator, the interviewee helped identify the marketing of the SMS as a key area for reform. The use of excessively complex debating jargon was identified as a drawback to an inclusive SMS (Quinn, 2021). Incentivising voting participation was raised as a potential concern, as well as the removal of current policy which allows any student at Edinburgh University to attend student council (Quinn, 2021).

LUU's Democratic Engagement Manager, Michael Hewitson (2021), confirmed our prior research which found that language has a profound impact on accessibility. The interview provided key areas in which to adopt best practice. Offering increased support to students in formulating motions and the use of a randomly selected panel of students were two proposals

guided by the practices of LUU. Support for students during the writing process has encouraged those with less confidence in student democratic processes to submit motions to LUU, broadening the scope of their participation. The selection of students to a decision-making panel based on the demographic makeup of the student body has expanded participation levels by involving new students in the process, ensuring that participation does not remain static. Students incorporated into the democratic system through the panel often go on to involve themselves with LUU's system in other ways. The interviewee confirmed the success of this practice as LUU consider the payment of panellists a worthwhile trade-off for increased long-term participation (Hewitson, 2021).

EUSA's Website

We used data from the website, [Student Crowd](https://www.studentcrowd.com/) to determine the top 20 Student Unions in the UK (Studentcrowd.com., 2021). They gathered their data using a university review form that was filled out by 7,849 students. Whilst their results showed the top 20 Student Unions, we were only concerned with the top 5 to keep our research focussed, with number one rating the highest. In order from top rating to number. 5, the results were: Loughborough University, The University of Sheffield, The University of Dundee, The University of Leeds, Cardiff University.

We used the following topic headings to guide our research: Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion Sections and Additional Recommendations.

Democratic Theory: Legitimacy and Participation in the SMS

As noted, one of the main findings from our survey was that there is a lack of engagement and participation within the student motion system. In this section, we draw on democratic theory to argue that increasing participation will improve the EUSA student motion system. Firstly, increased participation will improve the democratic legitimacy of the student motion system. Secondly, increased participation has the potential to improve the quality of decision-making outcomes. We outline each argument in turn, before drawing on these arguments to suggest recommendations for how participation can be improved.

'Participation' refers to political participation, which can be defined as individuals acting in a way that influences political structures (van Deth, 2016). While most often associated with voting, participation can refer to a whole plethora of activities, such as contacting representatives, engaging in political debates and joining campaigns.

In terms of EUSA's student motion system, there are two types of participation that seem most relevant. Firstly, voting on motions at student council or in campus wide referendums. Secondly, proposing motions to be discussed at the student council meetings. Although not

exhaustive, these are the types of student engagement that we refer to when discussing ‘participation’.

We argue that increased participation in this way will improve the legitimacy of the student motion system. Legitimacy is a complex and contested concept. In normative terms, a system holds legitimacy when its policies are the product of an acceptable and justifiable process (Peter, 2017). One type of mechanism that is often viewed as rendering a process justifiable is consent. This is because a group providing consent (say, through a vote) means those who will be impacted by the policy have had their say on the outcome.

It must be made clear that there are many ways in which EUSA displays strong levels of legitimacy, for example it has always been open to all students to run for and partake in the process. Our argument here is not that EUSA lacks legitimacy, but rather that increasing participation within the student motion system will *enhance* EUSA’s legitimacy. As [Blondel et al. \(1998\)](#) note, legitimacy is not a binary concept – a system is not legitimate or illegitimate. Rather, a system is more or less legitimate. Thus, our aim here is to suggest that participation improves EUSA’s democratic legitimacy.

Legitimacy is important for multiple reasons, two of which will be briefly highlighted here. Firstly, legitimacy is important for reasons of effectiveness. Specifically, increasing the legitimacy of EUSA will increase EUSA’s efficacy in performing its function. This is because if EUSA can clearly document a huge mandate from the student population for its policies then EUSA will have a better capacity to implement their policy. Secondly, legitimacy is also a democratic good or, as Peter (2017) describes it, a “virtue” of democratic systems. That is, democratic systems should strive towards greater levels of legitimacy as it reflects a fair and justifiable process.

Now, why should we think that participation improves legitimacy? The idea is that increased participation means more student voices are represented in the decision-making process. The increased representation of student voices implies a greater level of consent on behalf of the student body. The increased level of consent means that EUSA can more justifiably perform its task of representing the student body as more students have influenced the outcome. Therefore, by ensuring the consent of students, increased participation enhances the legitimacy of EUSA.

The second argument we have drawn from democratic theory is that increasing participation within the student motion system has the potential to improve the quality of decision-making. That is, a wider number of students proposing, debating and voting on motions is likely to lead to better EUSA policy. So, why should we think that increasing participation improves decision-making? As Vandamme and Verret-Hamelin (2017) argue, increased participation allows a wider “cognitive diversity” – that is, a broader array of perspectives – to be present in the decision-making process, allowing for more robust policy formulation. This is because a diversity of views and life experiences can allow for the creation of policy that reflects the varied needs of different societal groups. In terms of EUSA, increasing the involvement of students within this system will allow for this enhancement in cognitive diversity and thus be a promising way of improving output from the EUSA student motion system.



Recommendations

1. EUSA must develop a more effective marketing scheme of the student motion system to spread awareness and encourage participation

A key finding that arose from our data was the lack of awareness surrounding the EUSA motion system. The survey we conducted revealed that 75% of respondents did not know how the motion process at EUSA works. A further 13% were unsure. Evidently, there was a lack of clarity surrounding the existence, accessibility and usage surrounding the motion system.

When asked how the motion system could be improved, respondents frequently cited a need for increased awareness. In fact, this came up 20 times out of the 29 participants who provided a written response. It became apparent that respondents felt a critical problem in the EUSA system was that they didn't know about it and/or how to partake in it. The idea of a lack of general awareness by students of the EUSA system and process was acknowledged while conducting an interview with the Democracy and Campaigns Coordinator for EUSA. This point was elaborated on - the interviewee stated that he felt the council hasn't been promoted in the right way, including generic calls to action and a limited focus on the motion process (Scott, 2021). This seemed problematic because a lack of awareness of the system will curb students from engaging in it. Thus, this will result in a less democratic student motion system due to a lack of participation.

Based on this information, it felt prudent that we devise policy recommendations that could improve upon this issue. Our recommendation to introduce more effective marketing of the EUSA system will improve student democracy by encouraging successful participation through awareness.

This could include the formulation of a new marketing strategy. For example, rebranding EUSA and utilising this change to convey to students how best to get involved within the democratic process could be an opportunity to re-engage students with a more accessible-sounding, and realistically engaging system. This could link with our first recommendation of changing the language and jargon surrounding the current motion system.

The promotion of this change could be achieved on various social media platforms, as well as via students' university emails. It could furthermore be talked about at freshers week events, and other information sessions. This should be most effectively done with a short, clear and concise chat from a EUSA representative about their system and how to engage. This is based on our research findings that showed concise and understandable language to be more appealing to students.

This information could also be relayed to students by encouraging personal tutors and student support officers to discuss the motion system as an effective way for students to enact change within their university and city. This would be a direct call for attention.

To this point, it was acknowledged in two interviews - one with the Democracy and Campaigns Coordinator for EUSA and one with the Democratic Engagement Manager at Leeds University Union - that promoting to students the success stories of students who have engaged, been successful and effected progress with their motion, is an area of ongoing development for them, and something they are trying to improve upon. The acknowledgement that this has been a problem for different student democracy managers evidences that it is widely considered to be an area which could effectively engage students and be used as a tool to increase participation.

Another marketing tool that could increase participation and awareness of the EUSA democratic process would be an incentivisation scheme. One of our case studies - the Leeds University Union (LUU) - utilises a system where the members selected to vote on a proposal are paid £20 to attend. As they are selected based on criteria ensuring they are representative of the student population demographic, and not on a volunteer-basis, this encourages them to attend. In our interview, the Leeds University Union's Democratic Engagement Manager said that this policy was initially supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and later incorporated into their system. According to the LUU representative, over half of those who participated in this way stated that they would have participated without the financial incentive. However, as they were asked after the fact, it is not clear how accurate this is.

2. EUSA must change their language to be more accessible, approachable and less regimented.

We recommend that EUSA adopts language that is more accessible to the wider student population by moving away from formal debate procedure.

Current practice requires students to engage with the system through debate jargon that assumes prior knowledge of the SMS. Students must navigate this language on the EUSA website and subsequently participate in a formal speech-making process in order to submit their motion.

Our initial findings from Student Council papers (EUSA, 2021) found EUSA's language and debate procedure overly formal and unapproachable. When asked what a good SMS offered, responses focussed on accessibility and clarity, indicating that a change in language would help students engage with student council. Our findings were supported by interviews with Democracy Managers at both Leeds University Union and EUSA. Both interviewees confirmed that language which assumes prior knowledge of Student Council presents a barrier between students and a SMS.

In 2009, Leeds University Union carried out research to improve student democracy. Student responses led them to conclude that: "The language used around democracy needs to change to make it more instinctual and accessible."

Among the five top rated student associations identified in our research, four universities (Cardiff, Dundee, Leeds and Loughborough) have opted for the use of accessible language, such as ‘ideas’ instead of ‘motions’. These universities have adopted more casual submission processes and less regimented meeting proceedings (Cardiff, 2021), (DUSA, 2021), (LSU, 2021), (Leeds University Union, 2021).

Simple, action-oriented terminology such as ‘idea’, rather than ‘motion’, is more approachable for students who are less familiar with formal debate procedure. Relaxing phraseology will motivate students to engage in the SMS, who may otherwise feel discouraged by the process. Student democracy at EUSA will therefore cater more broadly to the student body as a whole.

3. Feedback mechanisms need to be improved and instilled by EUSA, to ensure consistent feedback from participants and continual improvement of the system.

We recommend that EUSA routinely check in with participants through online surveys to assess feelings and attitudes towards the system, in turn allowing for more prompt adaptations than the current 3-4 year review mechanism.

Our survey indicated that potential participants in the SMS felt that there was little input by the wider student body. The inclusion of a direct feedback mechanism would strengthen the link between the SMS and students outside of EUSA. This will incentivise students to participate who may feel that change in the system is beyond individual students’ capability.

In our interview with Leeds University Union’s Democratic Engagement Manager, the interviewee made multiple references to data that evidenced the success of their SMS. This feedback was obtained through online surveys distributed to all prior participants, without which Leeds University Union would have been unable to substantiate the strengths of their system or identify the weaknesses that they have sought to address (Hewitson, 2021). Figure 5 in the appendix outlines how current feedback practices facilitate this process.

We therefore recommend that EUSA adopts a similar approach to ensure that improvement does not become static, is rooted in thorough evidence, and is guided by student input, fostering a greater sense of inclusion in the SMS. This will in turn strengthen the credibility of the SMS as potential participants will have evidence of comprehensive evaluation of the process and their individual role within this.

4. A member of EUSA staff needs to be available to mentor students throughout the process of drafting their proposal to maximise ease of use.

A SMS designed to maximise ease of use for the student will help increase participation by limiting the burden placed on the individual proposing the motion. EUSA offers drop-in sessions throughout the year where students can receive support in drafting a proposal.

Current practice therefore relies on the individual student to assume the responsibility of attending these sessions if they require additional support.

86% of respondents in our survey did not know how to vote in a motion. This indicates that the majority of students accessing the motion system for the first time would be unclear as to how their proposal would be received and implemented without any additional support. Only 11% of respondents indicated that they knew how the motion system worked, despite 21% of respondents being former participants in EUSA in some form. The current SMS still eludes individuals with experience working with EUSA, suggesting an urgent need to demystify the process through direct support to individual.

We recommend that a member of EUSA's democracy team work closely with students to help shape their proposal to ensure it is suitable for student council and potential implementation. The expertise of EUSA staff will help ensure that student's ideas are more realistic and applicable to current university practice.

This would drive participation by reducing the student's individual workload. It would make the SMS more accessible for students with incomplete ideas who still wish to engage in making change. EUSA staff could offer support to students who have never presented to an audience like student council. This will ensure that students who feel they lack a background in debate procedure do not feel this is an impediment to enacting change on university campus.

We further recommend that EUSA makes explicitly clear that this support will be offered to students through the SMS website to ensure that potential participants are aware of this service and are thus more likely to submit a motion to the website. Figure 7 of the appendix illustrates how Leeds University Union demonstrate their one-to-one approach offered to students drafting a proposal. We recommend that EUSA produce a similar video to encourage students that support is readily accessible on a one-to-one basis.

5. EUSA needs to improve the formatting of their website to ensure accessibility.

Our research suggested that accessibility was a large issue with the EUSA student motion process. Our broad recommendation for the website is to better format the EUSA website to ensure accessibility and participation. This section breaks that down into two different, yet related, recommendations.

It will begin with a brief analysis of different University Student Union webpages, drawing on their strengths and will contrast and compare these to the EUSA webpage.

i. EUSA must develop a specific, clear section on the EUSA website dedicated to the Student Motion System. This should include a visual aid which outlines the system.

Loughborough University was particularly clear on its website. It had two clear sections that students can find if they are looking to get involved in the Student Union process: Academic Experience and Democracy and Representation.

The Academic Experience section clearly delineated its purpose – ‘*Empowering Students. Encouraging Feedback. Enhancing Education.*’ Although brief, it quickly let the audience know its purpose in a brief and catchy way. Whilst the website does not refer to their Academic Representation section as their Student Motion process, there were similarities between the two which offer useful sites for comparison. They use a visual aid (Figure 5) to explain how students are involved in the student union system.

Similarly to Loughborough’s ‘Academic Experience’ section, The University of Dundee had a ‘Get Involved’ section that clearly outlined how their student union operated, with minutes of meetings easily accessible. They also provided a visual aid to facilitate understanding (Figure 6).

Cardiff University had a ‘Student Voice’ section that was both interactive and visually appealing. (Figure 7) It clearly outlines how students are to escalate an issue they may have and current campaigns that they have. Finally, The University of Leeds had a ‘Student Voice’ section where students can ‘Submit an Idea’ . This was also clear, concise and visually engaging.

In contrast, when we tried to access The University of Edinburgh’s Student Union page, EUSA, the message ‘*Disallowed Key Characters – please clear your cookies and refresh the webpage to solve this issue*’ immediately appeared. This denies students access from the onset. We found this was a compatibility issue with Chrome browsers, as it was accessible via Safari.

When we were able to access the page through specific URL links, the information about the motion process was not readily apparent and was hidden behind several different tabs and subheadings. Whilst EUSA offered booklets for explaining the motion process on the website, these were not compatible with all browsers which limited accessibility. We believe this could be resolved through fixing the technical bugs which are causing the compatibility issues and making clear and bold headings delineating how to access the information.

From our own observations, we noted that the booklets were lengthy and often confusing making it difficult to understand. Oftentimes, lengthy paragraphs explaining how the system works could have been replaced with infographics, bullet points or a video.

ii. We recommend that EUSA develops a specific section of their website dedicated to Inclusivity and Diversity.

Loughborough University's 'Democracy and Representation' section (Figure 8) was useful for providing a clear and transparent option for students to learn about how the student union is ensuring it is inclusive. In particular, their 'Ideas Forum' (Figure 9) provided students an accessible option to pose their thoughts to the student union and the subsequent escalation process.

We believe this would be a direct way to ensure that i) EUSA is engaging in efforts to increase diversity and outreach and, ii) students are made explicitly aware of this through increased transparency.

Greater emphasis on inclusivity and diversity will ensure that the SMS is better positioned to serve students at Edinburgh University by ensuring that the system is representative of the student body as a whole. The communication of a clear commitment to fostering a culture of diversity will encourage students from a wider range of backgrounds to attend meetings and access these resources.

Diversity will strengthen the credibility of EUSA's SMS as it will ensure that motions proposed to EUSA do not exclusively cater to a single student type, thus enhancing the systems benefit to all students. The inclusion of individuals from a variety of backgrounds will have further knock-on effects as students will be more likely to engage if they can see themselves already represented in student council.

Next Steps

On top of these five policy recommendations, we suggest one potential area for further consideration following further research into the viability of such a scheme.

This next step is the establishment of a randomly selected jury of students to be decision-makers on policy. In what follows, we highlight some important practical considerations for how this would work. Then, we outline two reasons why a randomly selected jury as decision-makers is a promising development for EUSA's motion system.

The randomly selected group of students would be made up of around 16 people. These 16 people would be representative of the student body at Edinburgh. That is, the random selection is carried along demographic lines, to ensure proportional representation of different genders and ethnic groups. One of the most challenging features of this is getting sufficient information about the student body for this selection process to occur. A data sharing agreement would need to be created between EUSA and the university, so that EUSA could have a spreadsheet with the relevant information of the student body. The democracy officer at Leeds noted that this was the most challenging task when establishing the randomly selected jury, but that it was worth it in the long run.

Also, this proposal would alter the role of the elected representatives at EUSA, but it would not make them redundant. Elected representatives would no longer be decision-makers - that is, they would not be the ones voting on motions - but they would still be involved in the process. They would be involved by being present at the meetings of the randomly selected jury to present information and thoughts on the motions. Elected representatives would therefore stay involved in the decision-making process, but their main role would now be informing and communicating with the randomly selected group.

The randomly selected group of students would convene for no more than 2.5 hours. If this time frame is insufficient to discuss all the motions, then a second randomly selected chamber can be established to discuss the extra proposals. This will ensure all motions that are suitable for discussion are discussed and that the process is not too time intensive for the randomly selected participants.

Lastly, ideally participants in the randomly selected jury could be paid a fee for their time, around £20. This payment will ensure that a broad array of students partake in the process and not just those who are politically active as is.

So, we have roughly outlined how a randomly selected chamber would work, but why is it a good idea? We offer both a theoretical and empirical reason to support this next step. We suggest that there is one main theoretical reason to move from elected representatives as decision-makers to a randomly selected and demographically representative jury. A randomly selected jury will be selected so as to be representative of the student demographic and as such can act as a microcosm for the student body. In this way, a randomly selected student jury can provide output that reflects the attitudes of the students as a whole. Attendees of student council meetings as is currently practiced do not possess this demographic representativeness and as such are not as well placed to represent the student body. Therefore, random selection

offers a powerful means to increase the representativeness of EUSA policy, allowing the policy to benefit the student population at large.

As well as theoretical support for this idea, our interview with the democracy officer at Leeds provided empirical support for this idea. He noted that they generally receive very positive feedback from participants and also have high levels of participation. He also said that the participants are normally very engaged with the process and many go on to become more involved with student democracy following the experience. As such, a randomly selected chamber is a means of invigorating student democracy at Edinburgh.

Overall, this seems like a promising way to ensure that EUSA decision-making is driven by the student body and to increase engagement with student democracy.



Conclusion

Our primary research highlighted a lack of engagement and awareness of the SMS. By drawing on democratic theory, we highlighted that this lack of engagement is problematic in two ways: lower levels of participation decreases the overall democratic legitimacy of the SMS; and it limits the overall quality of EUSA decision-making. As such, we proposed five ways in which participation in the SMS can be improved, drawing on both theoretical and empirical arguments. First, we suggested that more effective marketing of the SMS to the student population would increase awareness of the process. Second, we argued that the language surrounding the SMS could be made more approachable to students, such as changing the term ‘motion’ to ‘idea’. Third, we argued that a member of staff should work closely with students to encourage as much participation in the process as possible. Fourth, we argued that improved feedback mechanisms should be developed so that the system can be continually honed to students' needs. Fifth, we suggested that better formatting of the EUSA website should be used to ensure that information is readily accessible for students interested in engaging with the process. These five proposals are readily implementable and provide a promising means of increasing participation in the SMS. Finally, to complement these proposals, we also proposed a future next step to consider. This step is the creation of a randomly selected group of students to be decision-makers in order to further bolster our student democracy in the long-term.

Appendix

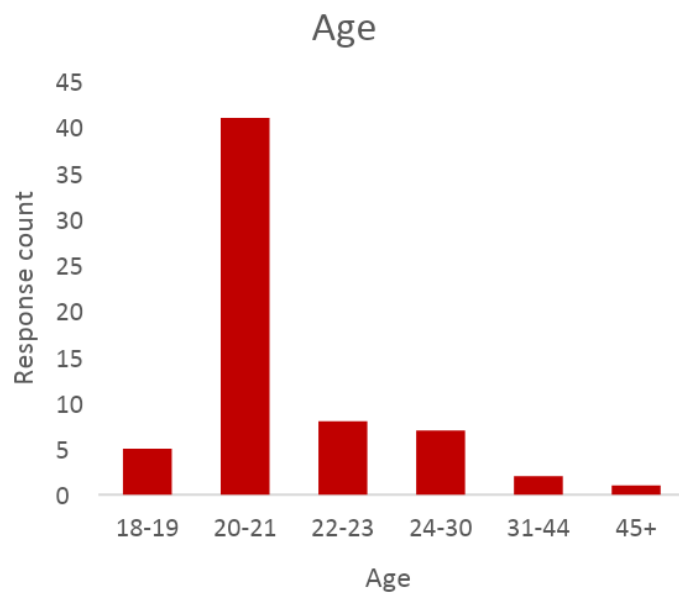


Figure 1

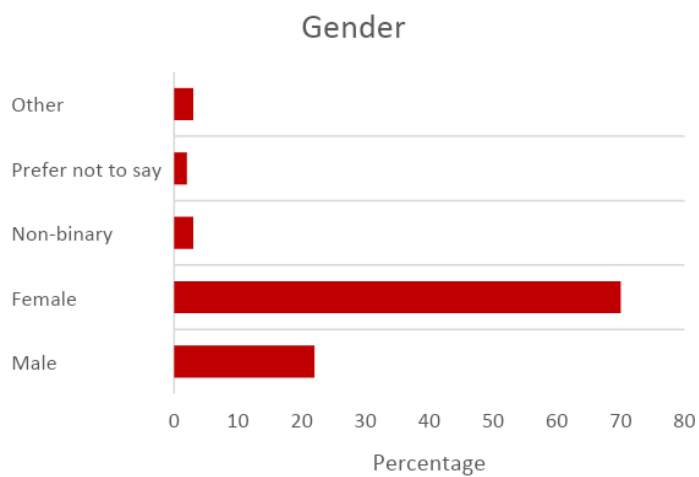


Figure 2



Figure 3

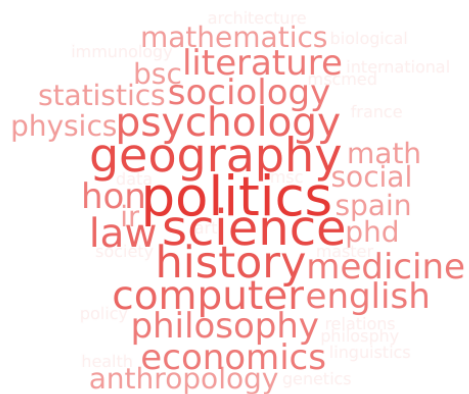


Figure 4

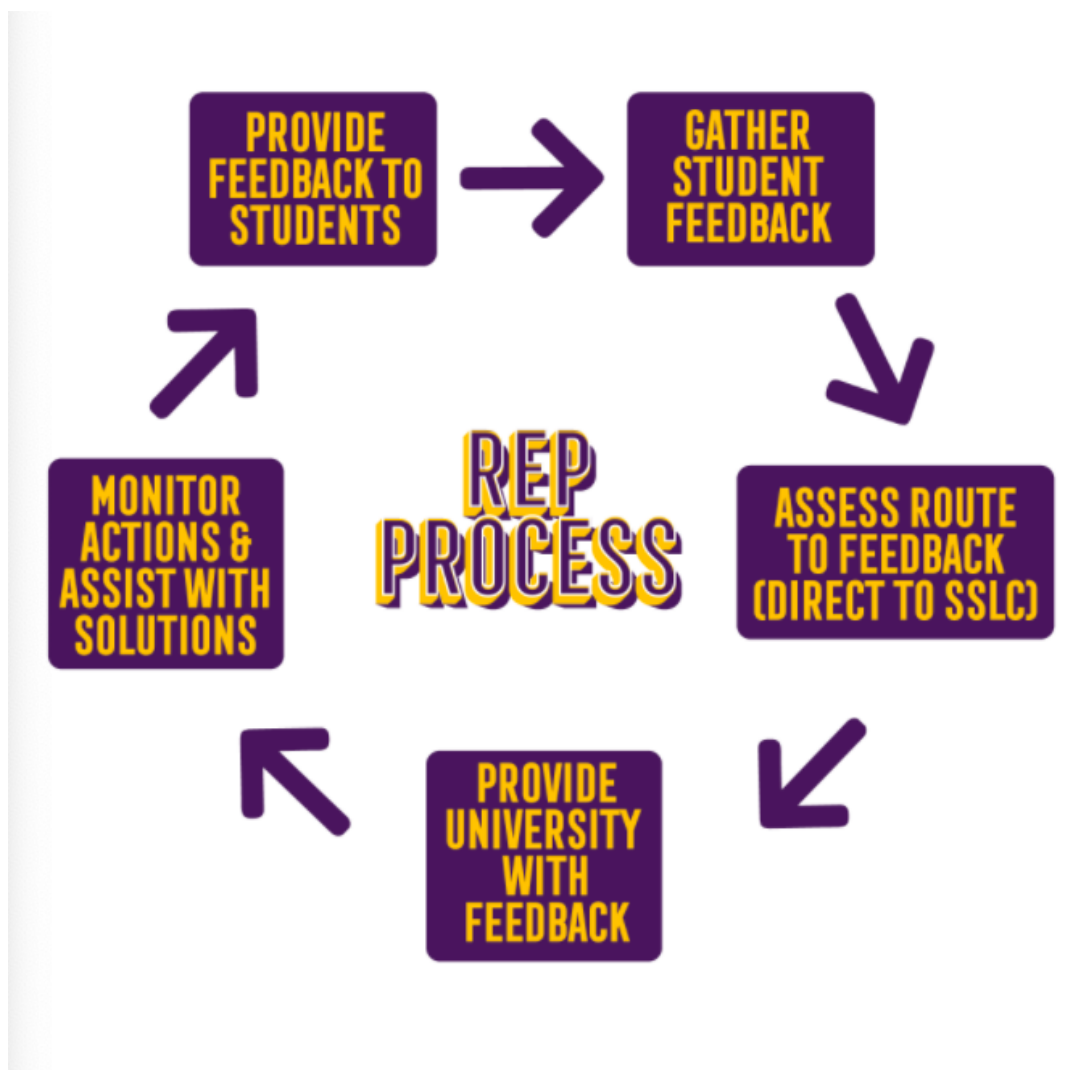


Figure 5

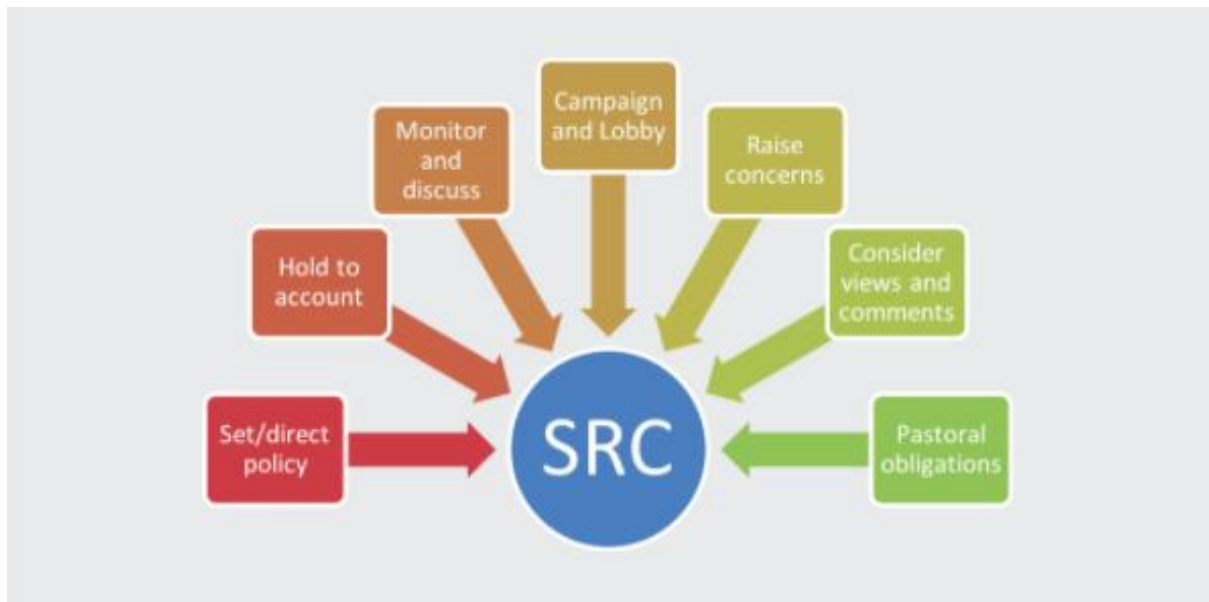


Figure 6


Submit an Idea

[Student Voice](#) > [Submit an Idea](#)

Make change in your Union

At LUU we're led by you, our 38,000 members – that means every single one of you can make a change to what we do, how we do it & who represents you.

The **'Better Forums'** are how policy and key decisions get made, and they're run by students. They happen three times a year, and there are three groups of students at each one.



They'll be able to chat through your idea with you, check that nobody else's repeated it, and let you know what to do next.

Watch on

Who attends

You: You'll need be there to tell people why you submitted your idea, and why you'd like the panel to vote yes.

Reps: Each Better Forum is attended by relevant reps. They'll relay other students' views and give feedback on ideas.

Student Panel: A randomly selected panel of 16 students will listen, ask questions, and decide whether to approve or reject your idea – like a jury. 75% of them need to say 'Yes' to turn your idea into policy. If they can't agree then ideas can move to a campus-wide referendum to let all students decide.

How to submit your idea

Have you got an idea for how to make the Union, the Uni or Leeds and beyond better? All you need to do is let us know. **fill out our form** or **email our Political Engagement Team** with your idea and why you'd like it to be considered, and we can have a chat. You can also **join our mailing list** to hear more about what's going on with policy, democracy and campaigns here at LUU.

Our current policy

You can also see which ideas have made it to policy, and the outcomes of previous forums, by checking out our **Policy minisite**.

Figure 7



Figure 8

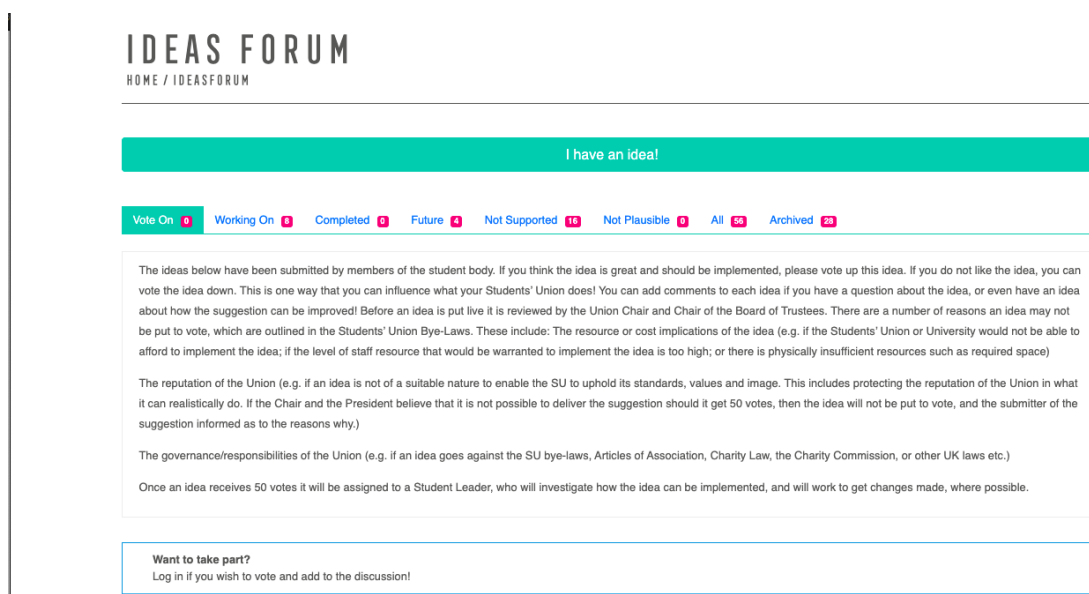


Figure 9



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