## Democracy Review Update

<table>
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<th>Outcome requested</th>
<th>The Review Panel is asked to <strong>note</strong> the update on the QMSU democracy review</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Key points to note</strong></td>
<td>QMSU is undertaking a democracy review to make sure that our democratic structures are representative of all students. The review started in 2018 under the Executive Officer Team of 2017-18. There are four main themes to the Democracy Review:</td>
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<td>- Increasing the number of Executive Officers to between 6-8.</td>
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<td>- Changing the representative structure of Student Council to improve the ratio of representatives to student numbers in HSS and S&amp;E and to improve engagement with Student Council.</td>
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<td>- Devolving power to sub-committees to allow policies to be passed at a level more accessible to students.</td>
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<td>- Improving accessibility to Student Council and Councillors.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Author</strong></td>
<td>Talhah Atcha, QMSU President</td>
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Democracy Review Update

Talhah Atcha – QMSU President
December 2019
Introduction

Queen Mary Students’ Union

Queen Mary Students’ Union (QMSU) is a democratic charity with a subsidiary trading company Queen Mary Students’ Union Services Limited (QMSUSL) which serves to enhance the experience of all students at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL). Its membership is made up of all current students of QMUL (unless they have chosen to opt-out) and is led on 3 levels, with 2 of these being made up entirely of elected students, or a majority of elected students (see the diagram below). The governance of the organisation (green arrows) is maintained by the Board of Trustees with 1/3rd of its membership being Officer Trustees who are elected by students, 1/3rd Student Trustees also elected by students, and 1/3rd being External Trustees who are appointed by a panel. The Board derives its powers from the Articles of Association. The University maintain a basic governing oversight of the Union as required by the 1994 Education Act. Student Council is the body responsible for setting policy for the Union and is made up entirely of 44 elected student representatives who volunteer in their spare time to carry out their roles. The Executive officers then enact policies (blue arrows). The Senior Management Team of the Union are full-time paid staff who manage the daily affairs of the Union and ensure continuity of the other 2 changing boards; they include the CEO, DCEO and DMD. They direct staff to provide services as set by the policies of Student Council interpreted by the Executive Officers or by projects the Executive Officers initiate (black arrows).
As well as leading and setting the direction of the Union, all of the elected representatives, Student Councillors and Executive Officers, represent students and work with the University to resolve any issues faced by students. They also run campaigns that educate or raise awareness of issues students face.

The Democracy Review pre-August 2019

The Democracy Review started in 2018 under the Executive Officer Team of 2017-2018. Initially this was done in response to a requirement to review the Articles of Association at least every 5 years as per the 1994 Education Act with any changes passed at an Annual General Meeting of all members. College Council, the governing body of the University, noted that the representation of Student Council was split roughly equally between Mile End and Barts and The London. Historically, the 50/50 split was agreed by all students on the merger of the medical schools with QMUL and the formation of a new Student Council at that time, and was therefore democratically agreed. Crudely, this can be interpreted as the Mile End half of Student Council representing 2 faculties and the Barts and The London half only representing 1 faculty.

In an effort to recognise the concern from College Council, as well as declining engagement by students and elected representatives, last year’s Executive Officers started a review of the Union’s democratic structures. It was noted that representation at BL worked well, with students having a lot more representation and so it was decided that any changes that needed to be made should mirror the BL structure for Mile End (and at this point, other campuses) students by increasing the number of their representatives. Monthly meetings were held to decide the overriding themes for the Review, with these being taken to the final Student Council of the year, in March 2019, which mandated the Executive Officers to conduct a student consultation. We, the current Executive Officers, then took up completion of the Review from this point on.

August

Timeline

The first thing we decided to do was to create a timeline for when different items needed to be presented to different boards in time for the elections period in January 2020 (noting that marketing material would need to be produced in December 2019). The ambitious deadlines for this can be seen below. We also assessed the risk of rushing through the Democracy Review, but felt that if this was made a priority then the Review could be completed without having to add an extra year and whilst the current Executive Officers had enough knowledge to carry it out to a rigorous standard.

Themes

There are 4 main themes to the Democracy Review with a collection of other small changes

Executive Officers – Increasing the number of Executive Officer to between 6-8. The workload of the Executive Officers has increased along with increasing student numbers and Executive Officers are regularly working 12 hours a day. This has been exacerbated by the University moving to working towards co-creation with students, which is a welcome development, but one that has added to the workload of the Exec. As such, more Executive Officers are needed to manage the increased workload.

Representation – Representation at BL works well for students as the ratio of representatives to student numbers is a lot lower than the other 2 faculties. There are also a number of positions that do not engage well with Student Council due to lack of policies that affect their positions/inexperience with student issues. Both of these problems could be solved by changing the representative structure of Student Council
August
- Plan the Democracy Review inc Deadlines
- Consolidate Themes of the Review from the previous year

September
- 16th to 5th - Student Consultation
- 16th to 5th - Alumni Consultation

October
- 8th - Initial Analysis of Consultations
- 10th Initial Report to College Council
- 22nd - Student Council Consultation
- 29th - Annual General Meeting - Changes to the Articles of Association

November
- Student Council Drop-ins
- 7th - Initial Report to the Board of Trustees
- 19th - ByeLaw changes made at Student Council
- 21st - College Council Ratification to the Changes of the Articles of Association

December
- Preparation for Elections
- Planning for Implementation of the Review
- 13th - Ratification of ByeLaw Changes by the Board of Trustees

January
- Start of Staffing Restructure
- 23rd - Student Council agree Terms of References for Sub-Committees and change ByeLaws to devolve power to Sub-Committees and change format of Student Council

February
- Elections
- Staff Consultation on Restructure
- 13th - Ratification of ByeLaw Changes by the Board of Trustees
Devolution – Student Council used to be a lot smaller but has grown with time. Devolution of power to the sub-committees would allow policies to be passed at a more direct level that is more accessible to students. This would also allow for smaller groups which would be able to do more than 1 large council. There are also a number of groups that are not represented well, and so new sub-committees could be created to look at their issues.

Accessibility – The current format of Student Council is old and inaccessible not only to students, but to Councillors as well. Councillors themselves are inaccessible to students with only their email addresses being provided on the website.

Others

- Trustee selection instead of election as students run and vote on a platform of representation instead of governance
- Lapse Student Council Policy early if complete and allow for policies to be embedded instead of being re-debated with limited time every 2 years. Council would be able to bring back any policies to be re-debated at their leisure
- Office hours for Councillors
- Campaign Calendar of all the campaigns Councillors carry out
- Mentoring Councillors by the Exec
- Digitalisation of the Council
- Reduce to 4 meetings per year in line with changes to the Board of Trustees & Board of Directors

September

Student & Alumni Consultation

Being aware of the consultation happening at the start of the academic year, and that at least a third of our questions would be targeted at first year students with no experience of the Students’ Union, we decided to split our student consultation into 2.

Part 1 would ask 5 simple questions about the basics of democracy and what students want from the Union. This was done for 2 reasons; the first of which was, as mentioned above, a lot of the first year students would have no experience of the Union and would therefore be unable to give us the detailed answers we would need. The second reason was that this would take place during Welcome Week, and we wanted a high volume of responses and so needed questions which would require no more than 2 minutes for students to answer, as we knew that answering our survey would not be a priority for any student.

The 5 questions were:

- What part of your university experience do you want to have a say on?
- When do you want to be involved?
- How do you want to engage?
- Which type of democracy should Queen Mary Students’ Union have?
- Would you take part in a focus group to do with the Review?

Part 2 contained 20 questions that went into more detail revolving around the themes. A version of this was also sent out to all Alumni students.
**October**

**Student Council Consultation**
Student Council were shown the results of the various surveys during the first Student Council of the year. Several questions were brought forward, as well as concerns, and these were taken into account during the final formation of the democratic structures. Of note were the reasoning for keeping a VP Education instead of replacing them with something else, not removing the Volunteering officer from Student Council and the structure of the Scrutiny Committee.

Due to the number and nature of the questions, it was decided to hold drop-in sessions before the next Student Council to look at issues in more detail. The Councillors with the most questions were also invited on a more personal basis to discuss the concerns they had and how these could be moved forward.

**Annual General Meeting**

An Annual General Meeting (AGM) was called in order to make changes to the Articles of Association. A 75% majority was needed for any resolutions to be passed. 2 resolutions were taken to AGM:

- The number of Trustees be increased by up to 6 for each type of Trustee and quorum should never be less than 6 and include 2 of each type of Trustee
- Student Trustees should be selected by an appointments panel instead of being elected

The first resolution would allow us to increase the number of Executive Officers to 6 (and alongside it increase the numbers of the other types of trustee). The second resolution would allow Student Council to appoint Student Trustees instead of electing them, which would solve the problem of Student Trustees being elected based on a platform of representation instead of trusteeship.

The first resolution passed, whilst the second failed, and this was ratified by College Council in November. In order to prevent 1/3rd of the Board of Trustees being made up of members who are not performing the role they were expected to, we will look at how students can be better informed about the position they are running for, or voting on.

**November**

Changes to the Bye-Laws were made in line with all of the consultations. These are summarised below:

**Executive Officers**

- President – Lead the Union and focus on development
- Vice President Welfare – General welfare issues including mental health, finance, security and residences
- Vice President Communities – Liberation campaigns and groups as well as working with groups which do not engage with the Union such as Postgrads and International Students
- Vice President Barts and The London – Education and Student Experience of BL SMD students
- Vice President Humanities & Social Sciences - Education and Student Experience of HSS students
- Vice President Science & Engineering - Education and Student Experience of S&E students

**Representation**

- Addition of 8 School Reps in HSS and 5 in S&E
• Both Faculty Boards also have their own: International Rep, Welfare Rep, Postgraduate Taught Rep and Postgraduate Research Rep
• Removal of the First Year Rep positions
• Removal of the RAG Officers from Student Council, but still having them elected

Devolution
• The power to pass policy at the sub-committees, but Bye-Law Changes to still go through Student Council
• An Executive Officer on each sub-committee to help the Exec understand what policies are being passed and the intended mandate on the Executive Officers that these would carry. The Exec in turn would also ensure that only policies affecting that sub-committee are passed and that anything else goes to Student Council
• The creation of the following sub-committees: Union Development, Postgraduate, International, Volunteering, Sustainability (this one currently exists as Green Mary but does not come under any Bye-Laws)

Future Work

The Accessibility, and Others themes changes still need to be made and will be discussed at the next Student Council in January 2020. Working with Councillors, we are looking at having issues brought to Student Council (including the ones from the online Ideas Page) with Council then creating policy in caucuses at Council. Forums for all reps can be held every month/term to allow students to drop in and pull different reps together where intersectional issues occur. These can then be brought to Student Council allowing for more direct democracy and reducing the inaccessibility of Councillors.

Implementation of the changes will need to start taking place from Term 2 and will form the focus of the fortnightly Democracy Review meetings going forward. This will start with the Terms of References for each sub-committee being drafted for the next Student Council.

Staffing changes will need to be made in line with changes from the Democracy Review, especially concerning the Representation & Democracy Department. These changes will be made alongside the other staffing changes the CEO will be making next term. A concerted effort will also be made to lobby the University to increase the block grant to meet the cost of the increase in staff that will be needed.

The Union does not currently have the resources to carry out a digital revolution of its services, though we know from anecdotal evidence, as well as the result of the first student consultation, that this is very much wanted. In line with the University’s 2030 strategy to have 10,000 distance learners by 2030, this is very much needed. I have already started on working on digitalising our Board of Trustees with the aim for this to be then rolled out to Student Council and then the rest of our services. As such, I am working with our CEO on creating a 5 year plan to build the capital needed to digitalise, as well as carrying out a full student consultation, and research into the technology to make this happen by 2025.