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Democratic Structure of the Students’ Union

Council is the highest level of student voice in the SU, the Constitution states that its role is to “To represent the views of students within the University, locally and nationally” and is the main decision making body within the SU.

Contact details for the Students’ Union Officers can be found on page 13.

A glossary for all terms related to elections can be found on page 11.
Your role as a Students’ Union Councillor

All councillors are expected to attend all meetings of Students’ Union Council and Council Workshops.

Students’ Union Council meets every other Thursday beginning at 5.15pm. Council Workshops take place on the weeks in between from 5pm-6.30pm.

Benefits of being a Councillor:
- Be a voice for students
- Public speaking experience
- Lobbying and campaigning experience
- Problem solving experience
- Shaping Students Union policy

Testimonies of past Councillors - why your role is important

“I have helped many students with different areas of study and made significant changes by working with departmental staff. I even managed to save my department from closure this year...Being an SU Councillor is the best choice I ever made.” Tracy Lee, TILL Councillor 2013/14

“I had one of the most exciting and rewarding years of my life. Being a Councillor means you can really get stuck in to student life and make serious change on behalf of your peers. Council is the main decision-making body in the Union, being part of it will teach you a lot about yourself and what you stand for.” Claire Roper, English Language and Linguistics Councillor 2011/12

Departmental Councillors
- Act as a representative for their academic department
- Keep students in their department up to date on the work of Students’ Union Council
- Raise issues affecting students in their department at Council
- Attend the meetings of their departmental Student Staff Committee
- Support student representation in their department

Representative Councillors
- Act as a representative for students from their representative group
- Keep students in their representative group up to date on the work of Students’ Union Council
- Raise issues affecting students in their representative group at Council
- Attend the meetings of their Representative Committee
- Actively encourage participation in their Representative Committee
- Support student representation in their department
What does it mean to be a Representative?

A Students’ Union Councillor is similar to being a Member of Parliament. You represent a constituency of students, whether they come from a department or a representative group.

It is up to you to communicate with the students you represent, to hear their views and find out what issues they want solved.

Departmental Councillors are more likely to face deal with academic issue. Sometimes these may be dealt with at Student Staff Committee or on an individual basis.

Representative Councillors can face a variety of issues; some can be dealt with on an individual basis, others may require the attention of the relevant Students’ Union Officer.

The key to solving issues quickly is keeping in contact!

How do I know which issues are my responsibility to deal with?

Signposting individuals to the right sources of advice is also an aspect of your role; where students come to you with personal issues, it is best to direct them to the Student Advice Centre on Level 3 of the Students’ Union, next to SSiD.

Councillors may choose to only bring up issues at Council which have been communicated by their constituents, others may also raise issues which they personally feel strongly about.

It is up to you which you choose to raise.

- **Issues that affect all students at the University**
  - Talk to the Students’ Union Officers, and potentially raise the issue at SU Council

- **Issues affecting students in your department or representative group**
  - This is exactly what your role is about. Talk to the students you represent, and take the issue to SU Council or to your Student Staff Committee

- **Issues specific to an individual**
  - Should not be handled by an SU Councillor as their role is to represent groups of students.
Where can I access support in my role?

Being a representative isn’t always easy, and can be confusing. If you are unsure about anything or if you would like some advice, come to the Student Groups Support office on Level 3 next door to Coffee Revolution.

We work to provide you with support and guidance. Adam, the Democracy Coordinator, will be your main contact. It is part of his role to support SU Councillors, so contact him at adam.hanrahan@sheffield.ac.uk with any questions.

How can I best communicate with the students I represent?

Emails

We can distribute emails on your behalf to those that you represent. Email what you want to say to sucouncil@sheffield.ac.uk. Due to the arrangement with the university about these email lists, we can only distribute a maximum of one email every two weeks, unless in exceptional circumstances.

Students’ Union Website

Each Councillor has space on our website where you can put up a photo and your contact details, and anything else you feel would be useful. It can be updated as often as you want.

Forge Press

The student newspaper can be a great way to raise an issue and get a high profile. However, always try and make sure you have exhausted the conventional methods of problem solving before you resort to going to the press. They are editorially independent so there is little the SU can do if you’re not happy about the way something is covered. You should email news@forgetoday.com if you have something that you think they would be interested in.

Staff Support

Our Democracy team are on hand to provide support and advice whenever you need it. Just email sucouncil@sheffield.ac.uk or find us on Level 4 of the Students’ Union in the Student Groups Support office.
Departmental Councillors and Committees

As a Departmental Councillor, you will support Academic Reps in your department to bring up academic issues in your department.

You will attend Student Staff Committees (SSCs) here you will have the opportunity to informally share with staff the views of the students that you represent. You may also be invited to your Faculty Student Staff Committee if you’re elected as Faculty rep.

Student Staff Committees: Some things to note
- Some departments have separate SSCs for undergraduate and postgraduate students
- Members of academic staff should also attend, but students should be the majority at SSC meetings
- Course Reps and Students’ Union Councillors for the department should attend
- There should be two course reps for each year in all departments
- You might find it useful to attend the specialist Academic Rep training sessions and events run by the Academic Rep Committee to meet other Reps and find out more about getting involved in your department.

How to be effective in your role and make a positive impact at SSCs

Before the meeting - Read the agenda before the meeting and have a good idea of the points you are going to raise – be clear and to the point
  - You should act as a team leader amongst departmental Academic Reps – assist them in representing other students on the course and raising issues at the SSC
  - Try to have pre meetings with Academic Reps in your department before the SSC so that you are familiar with the issues which will be raised or which you might want to raise

During the Meeting - Focus on communicating the issues presented to you by students but don’t raise issues concerning specific individuals
  - Build good working relationships with staff – raise any serious concerns before the SSC
  - Be polite and don’t criticise individuals
  - Don’t be afraid to ask questions if you don’t understand something!

After the meeting – make a note of the decisions which were made so that you can pass this on.
If you would like any further support or have any questions with working alongside Academic Reps, Faculty Reps or Departmental Societies then contact Scott Dawson, Academic Representation Coordinator, scott.dawson@sheffield.ac.uk.

Representative Councillors and Committees

Each representative committee has an officer contact. It is a good idea to contact the officer and chat to them about how the committee works and how to contact them.

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Committee – Women’s Officer
Disabled Students Committee (DSC) - Women’s Officer
International Students Committee (ISC) – International Students’ Officer
LGBT+ Committee – Women’s Officer
Mature Students Committee (MSC) - Women’s Officer
Postgraduate Students Committee – Education Officer
Women’s Committee (WomCom) – Women’s Officer

What sort of issues might come up?

Assessment and feedback – lack of prompt or detailed feedback on work or lack of anonymous marking
Personal tutor support – lack of awareness about who personal tutors are and how to contact them
Resources – teaching spaces, computers, library areas which don’t meet student needs
Teaching methods – unhelpful lecturers or lack of handouts and power points
Module registration – poor guidance in choosing modules or difficulty in getting on to preferred modules
Council Meetings

There are three main elements to the Students’ Union Council’s role in the organisation: Setting Policy, Democratic & Constitutional Oversight and Officer and Organisational Scrutiny.

1. Setting Policy - Council is responsible for setting SU policy, deciding on the direction of the SU’s campaigns and expressing opinions on behalf of students.

Policy can only be made through Council or passed by a referendum.

- Where there is a conflict between a policy passed by Council and one passed by referendum, the referendum result has a larger mandate so will carry.

Policy is the highest level of decision in the SU. A policy binds the SU to a course of action or opinion for three years, after this time, it returns to SU Council for review.

Formal process for a policy

- Any councillor can submit a policy proposal in writing to the President. Proposals must be 200 words or under and need the support of one other Councillor.

- The President will publish notice of any proposed policy. It will be published on the SU website and circulated to members of Council within 10 days, inviting related proposals no more than 200 words within 10 days after publication. Related proposals must be submitted in writing to the President by a member of Council or by 11 members of the Students’ Union (i.e. University of Sheffield students).

- Proposals need the approval of two-thirds of Council to become Policy. Proposals with less than two-thirds support but more than half may be submitted to a referendum, a vote put to the whole student body. The Student Executive Committee may refer any decision to a referendum for voting by the membership. If a proposal achieves two-thirds approval at Council, then it will be effective pending the result of the referendum.

Organisational Scrutiny

Opinions and Select Committees

- Council can express an opinion on an issue – this is an informal statement from the student body which does not bind the SU to an action, unlike a policy. Proposals for council to express an opinion are submitted in the usual way to Council.

- Much like Parliamentary Select Committees, SU Select Committees are a small group of Councillors who are nominated to examine an issue closely, and return to council with proposals of how best to take it forward. This can be a good way of looking at issues in detail without taking up time at a Council meeting.

- NUS also has the final say on policy proposals to NUS national conference.

Policy passed at council is the start of a campaign, not the end. A policy on a piece of paper doesn't mean that its end goal has been achieved!

*you can put forward a policy proposal online at sheffieldsu.com/councilonline. If you contact sucouncil@sheffield.ac.uk then we can help you through the process. Any policy proposal must be under 200 words and must be submitted a minimum of 15 days before the meeting that it is to be discussed at. You can also put forward motion proposals. *
2. Democratic & Constitutional Oversight

**Returning Officers for Students’ Union elections are appointed by Council.** They are responsible for overseeing elections, ensuring that they are run properly and to consider any complaints. Returning Officers submit a report to council following each election. **Council is also responsible for hearing any appeals against the decisions of the Returning Officers, and is the final level of appeal for candidates who disagree with the rulings of the returning Officers.**

Council also elects a Constitutional Review Committee to ensure that the Students’ Union’s constitution is relevant and effective. Most amendments to the constitution require a referendum so the committee will report to Council with its proposals and, if accepted by Council, these will then go to the student body.

3. Officer & Organisational Scrutiny

**key part of the role is holding the Officers to account.** Council has the responsibility of approving the officers’ objectives, and scrutinising their work when officers update Council on their progress.

**Officers also have responsibility to ensure that Union policy is being enacted.** Officers will bring updates on work done on policies, and council can ask questions about this, if you don’t feel that enough is being done on a specific policy or that policy isn’t being upheld, you should raise it at Council!

**Council can choose to censure an Officer** if there is a strong feeling that they are failing to perform their duties as laid down in the constitution or policy. They can also commend officers on their work in order to recognise excellent performance.

the Su’s proposed budget will be brought to Council. This is not for Council to decide on, but **Council can make recommendations for change to the Board of Trustees.** These recommendations will be taken very seriously.

**Council also approves the nominations of the four external and four student trustees of the Students’ Union.** The Trustee Board is responsible for overseeing the management and governance of the Students’ Union.
Glossary

**Alternative Voting System (AVS)** – The voting system we use in our elections. To win an election under this system a candidate must get 50% +1 of all votes. Voting is by preference, so voters vote 1 for their first choice, 2 for their second, etc. After each round of counting the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and the second preferences for those ballots are redistributed. This continues until a candidate reaches 50% +1 of the votes.

**Board of Trustees** – The governing body of the Union. They have ultimate responsibility for strategy, finance and governance. It is made up of the eight Students’ Union Officers, four external members and four student members. Council received the minutes of the Board and agrees the appointment of student and external trustees.

**Chair of Council** – A member of Council elected at the first meeting of each semester to preside over the meetings and ensure that they run effectively.

**Constitution** – The set of regulations which govern the Students’ Union.

**Council Workshop** – A meeting for Councillors every fortnight (in the weeks with no full meeting of Council) with the opportunity to gain further information or receive additional training.

**Course Rep** – Student recruited to represent the views of other students in their department.

**Departmental Assemblies** – These are open meetings for all students held twice a term in a department. They do not have a specific learning and teaching focus and staff do not attend.

**Departmental Organisers** – These are students employed by the SU to organise and facilitate the twice term departmental assemblies.

**Director of Teaching** – Member of University staff responsible for teaching strategies in a department.

**Faculty** – Group of departments that share similar interests. There are five faculties: Arts & Humanities, Engineering, Medicine Dentistry & Health, Science, Social Science.

**Faculty Forum** – Forum for faculty reps to raise issues with the education in the faculty.

**Faculty Pro Vice Chancellor** – Lead member of academic staff in a faculty.

**Faculty Rep** – Student recruited to represent the views of students within their faculty.

**Finance Executive Committee** – A meeting of the Students’ Union Officers where financial decisions relating to the Union are made.

**Head of Department** – Lead member of academic staff in a department.

**Hustings** – Opportunity for candidates to give a speech and answer questions from voters.
**Liberation groups** – The autonomous NUS campaigns representing minority or marginalised groups. Each headed by an elected Officer and Committee. These are elected at annual conferences, separate for each group. Each member Union can send delegates to liberation conferences.

**National Union of Students (NUS)** – The national representative organisation of students, which all Sheffield students are a member of.


**National Student Survey (NSS)** – An annual survey which asks all final year undergraduates to provide feedback on their course.

**Postgraduate Taught (PGT)** – Student who has completed their first degree and is studying a taught Masters degree (usually for one year).

**Postgraduate Research (PGR)** - Student who has completed their first degree and is studying a research degree (can be up to four years).

**Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)** – Annual survey which asks final year PGT students to provide feedback on their course.

**Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)** - Annual survey which asks final year PGR students to provide feedback on their course.

**Pro-Vice Chancellor for Learning and Teaching** – A member of University staff responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of teaching strategies, across the University.

**Re-Open Nominations (RON)** – A candidate in all elections that we hold. If a voter feels that they do not wish to vote for any of the available candidates they may choose RON. In the event that RON is the candidate with the most votes, another election will be held.

**Representative Committee** – the people selected by a minority/liberation group to help coordinate activities for the interests of that group.

**SSC Co-ordinator** – Member of University staff who organises a department’s SSC.

**Senate** – Key university meeting held approximately twice a semester which acts as the ‘academic parliament’ with representatives from across departments and services. The Students’ Union has seats on Senate, including Faculty reps and five Officers.

**Single Transferable Vote System (STVS)** – Proportional system of voting. Elections to NUS national conference are held under this system. A quota of votes is set base on the number of positions available and the number of voters. Candidates must reach the quota to be elected. Voting is preferential with eliminated candidates’ votes being redistributed and a fraction of elected candidates’ votes above the quota being redistribute.

**Student Staff Committee (SSC)** – Forum for course representatives to raise issues or problems concerning the education within their department.
Student Executive Committee (SEC) – The eight full time Officers of the Students' Union meet each fortnight at SEC. minutes are reported to Council.

Students' Union Officer – A student elected in March to work full time as a representative of students for one academic year.

Undergraduate (UG) – A student studying for their first degree.

Union Faculty Rep – A member of the Students’ Union council elected to take forward the views of the faculty to University Senate. Elected at the first meeting of Council.

Union Policy – A decision made by all students or by Students’ Union Council. Policy is the opinion or position of the Union on an issue, and it lasts for 3 years.

University Council – The governing body of the University, overseeing the work of the University Executive Board. They have overall control over university strategy, finance, compliance and governance. The President and Finance Officer are members of University Council.

University Executive Board (UEB) – The highest management committee of the University. All pro-Vice Chancellors are members in addition to heads of certain key services.

Useful Contacts

- President - su-president@sheffield.ac.uk
- Education Officer - education.officer@sheffield.ac.uk
- Welfare Officer - welfare.officer@sheffield.ac.uk
- Women's Officer - womens.officer@sheffield.ac.uk
- International Officer - international.officer@sheffield.ac.uk
- Sports Officer - sports.officer@sheffield.ac.uk
- Activities Officer - activities.officer@sheffield.ac.uk
- Students’ Union Development Officer - development.officer@sheffield.ac.uk

SU Council email address – sucouncil@sheffield.ac.uk
Adam Hanrahan (Democracy Coordinator) – adam.hanrahan@sheffield.ac.uk
Kathryne Fraser (Deputy Director of Membership Engagement) – k.fraser@sheffield.ac.uk
Amy Thornton (Head of Student Group Support) – amy.thornton@sheffield.ac.uk
Jaki Booth (Chief Executive) – jaki.booth@sheffield.ac.uk