

Paper on Proposed Changes to Management Group Elections

Proposer – Michael Edwards, Ordinary Member of Union Council (FoNS UG)

Seconders – Abhijay Sood, Ordinary Member of Union Council (FoNS UG), Sina Lari, SCC Chair, Lloyd James, RCSU President

The Union Notes:

- 1) Over the course of two consultations, of both the Clubs and Societies Board (01/11) and the Union Council (08/11), a number of issues have been identified with the process for election to management group positions. **The results of these consultations can be found in the minutes for these board meetings on the Union website**, and my statements and presentations to each Board can be found as appendices.

The Union Believes:

- 2) That the current system of election to Management Group officer positions violates, or at the very least ignores, the typical Standing Orders for a Management Group, and is against the Union's high standard for democratic selection of student officers to important decision-making roles.

The Union Resolves:

- 3) To accept one of the following courses of action as a matter of urgency to address the lack of democracy and oversight in these elections. Proposed timescale is to have these changes in place for the 2017-18 session, so as to provide a suitable time for the changes to occur without rush.
 - a. The suggested actions of the initial Memorandum (Appendix One).
 - i. All members of clubs in an MG to have voting rights in MG elections.
 - ii. Elections to migrate from AGM format to eVoting along with the rest of the (cross-campus ballot) elections in the February-March period each year, with full publicity of the roles being available to stand for.
 - iii. Amendment of Standing Orders for all MGs to accommodate the above changes.
 - b. Actions derived from CSPB and UC deliberations (Compromise 1).
 - i. The Key Officers for each Club, Society and Project in a Management Group shall have voting rights in Management Group Elections (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer).
 - ii. Nominations and elections to occur through eVoting, to enable the full eligible base to stand during the period, and to enable transparent voting. With full publicity in the Union election publicity cycle.
 - iii. Amendments to Standing Orders as appropriate.

- c. Actions derived from CSPB and UC deliberations (Compromise 2).
 - i. The system of One Club, One Vote is retained, alongside AGMs.
 - ii. Management Group roles given full publicity in the Union election publicity.
 - iii. A Union Governance Official, such as the Union Returning Officer or Deputy Returning Officer, is involved in the electoral process for Management Group elections from the open of nominations, and is sent to all MG AGMs to ensure the regulations for elections are being adhered to.
 - iv. Amendments to Standing Orders as appropriate.

Appendix One – The initial recommendations

Memorandum – Initial Thoughts on Management Group Elections Reform

Michael Edwards - Ordinary Member of Union Council (FoNS), RCSU Honorary Secretary, and Chair, SCC London Forum for Science and Policy

Abstract / TLDR

The elections to some fairly influential Union Officer roles are deemed to be undemocratic and require reform. The suggested change is to fold in MG Officer elections into the major March elections along their equivalent roles in the Constituent Unions, and open the elections for voting by cross-campus ballot by all CSP members within that management group. This will provide office holders with a stronger mandate and greater visibility in their roles, and empower students to select another set of voices that represent our clubs portfolio to College and the Union. A rough timeline for consideration is provided, but it, along with everything in this memorandum, is entirely up for debate.

Overview

This is a memorandum outlining a considered and discussed grievance with the state of some aspects of Union elections, and a lack of democracy in the election of senior officer positions ('senior' is taken to be holding a seat on two or more of the major Union committees and sub-committees as follows: Union Council, Education and Representation Board, Community and Welfare Board, and Clubs, Societies and Projects Board).

This memorandum will be presented at an upcoming Clubs, Societies and Projects Board meeting for consultation, summarily written up as a Council paper and presented to Council for scrutiny and consideration.

The current resolution is to tie in Management Group elections to the March Elections in the same way that Constituent Unions currently elect their officers. Pending discussion, eligibility for running and voting for a Management Group position shall be membership of a club within that Management Group. Changing elections is likely to cause a significant amount of administrative work for current Management Group officers in amending Standing Orders to meet the needs of the Paper, for which support from Union staff and sabbatical officers will be sought. However, the visibility Management Groups will gain from being engaged in the main annual election, the wider democratic mandate of their officers in their roles, and the wider pool of interested candidates can only benefit the running of Management Groups in future.

Management Groups at Imperial College Union

I feel that the current situation for Management Group Elections directly contravenes the democratic and open image that Imperial College Union wishes to portray, and that it portrayed during its apology and in its commendable actions following the recent electoral mishap. The examples of the Social Clubs Committee, or SCC, and the Royal College of Science Union, or RCSU, are taken as they are the Management Group and Constituent Union that I am most familiar with. If there are cases that exist that contradict what is written here, please let me know – I seek as wide a base of evidence and cases as possible.

- Constituent Union officers are elected in a cross-campus ballot every March with a significant amount of Union effort and person-hours, in terms of publicity and 'getting out the vote'. These elections are rightly lauded as some of the most democratic in the student unions of England and Wales, and are something we as elected representatives and officials can be proud of. The run-up from initial publicity to election results night takes up to six weeks, and the end-result is an election system that has worked for years.

- Management Group elections, on the other hand, are the domain of a handful of CSP Chairs, Treasurers and representatives in a system I'm dubbing 'One Club, One Vote'. Although all members of the Union are eligible to run for Management Group positions, the level of publicity of these positions is poor – for last year's SCC Annual General Meeting, officers of some SCC clubs were not informed of the AGM until some weeks after the occurrence. The place that some of the officer positions open for election at these meetings occupy in the Union (sitting on CSPB and Union Council for example) are quite significant, and hence should command the need for a robust election – however, the current system where in certain cases a limited 'selectorate' has sole power and responsibility to elect senior Union Officer roles is a shame to compare to the parallel above.

In summary – I believe that any Officer with a seat on one of the Union main governing committees and sub-committees (Council, CSPB, ERB, and CWB) deserves to be elected through a robust and fair election, that provides them with a decisive mandate for any actions they make as the holder of that role. The current system where Management Group officers are elected by a limited electorate is undemocratic and needs reform.

Reform of Management Group Elections

The solution and resolution I put to you is simple on the face of it and draws from the existing system – Management Group elections should be subsumed into the larger March elections and provided the full visibility and support of the Union publicity arm that swings into action every election season. Drawing a parallel between Constituent Unions and Management Groups, having a single method of election to officer positions on both bodies makes sense for a number of reasons, which I will outline as I go.

The necessary elections can be held at the same time and through the central Union electoral infrastructure as the 'Leadership Election' cycle in early March of each year. This is more convenient for Union Governance and Election officials as it removes the potential for misinterpretation or wilful manipulation of the Election rules through Management Group AGMs. It is also more convenient for Management Group officers who no longer have to organise AGMs to select their officers, and who take advantage of the publicity available for the wider election and the successful eVoting platform that is available for cross-campus ballots.

Utilising the March election opens the very favourable possibility of opening these elections to a wider electorate. There is a strong argument to be made in favour of this, in that the inclusion of more 'student voice' in the selection of its representatives is empowering for a student body. Eligible voting members for a Management Group election would be any member of a club within the Management Group before the opening of nominations, as per the Union regulations for Major and Minor Elections.

Legitimate concerns have been taken on board about the marginalisation of smaller clubs within management groups, and this could be deemed a positive case for the OCOV system as presently used. However, I feel that the inclusion of members of the clubs as members of the larger management group is to be sought - in the same way that members of Faculty of Natural Sciences departments are voting members of both their Departmental Societies and their Constituent Union, the RCSU. We should avoid the feeling of 'factionalisation' by CSP, and instead move to a system where membership of a club provides open voting rights to the club level and the MG level. *Some degree of this 'factionalisation' and nepotism is inherent in student union politics and is a problem to which I have no solution, but we can largely disregard it for the purposes of this paper.*

Another negative aspect of this proposal is that Standing Orders for Management Groups across Imperial College Union will require review and summary approval by Union Council to adhere to this new electoral process. Seeing as Management Groups work hard all year around to support CSPs, it would be remiss to force such a potentially

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disruptive change upon them, especially going into the budgeting process. I would suggest that a team of student officers and staff members, including the Returning Officers and other members of the Governance team, is convened to make a 'one-size-fits-all' adjustment that can easily supersede the existing regulations. This will require consultation of a Constituent Union constitution to get a sense of the wording, and a few hours work to smooth out the wording and ensure that the new wording applies as intended and as strongly as possible. The necessary changes could be made at a single meeting of Union Council following this work.

Proposed Timescale of Actions

This timescale is provisional and aims to have the officer roles up for their first election in the 2018-19 major election in March 2017.

Tuesday November 1st 2016	Consultation at Clubs, Societies and Projects Board – requiring DPCS and board member approval.
Tuesday November 8th 2016	Consultation and initial paper questions at Union Council – requiring Council Chair approval
Tuesday December 6th 2016	Vote on firm Paper for action moving forward
December 2016 – March 2017	Union staff and student officers to work on amending Standing Orders to adhere to paper. Intensive process, plus during budgeting – potential move to summer term?
By 21st March 2017	All MG Standing Orders should be suitably amended and approved by the Council.
March 2017 – February 2018	Union Staff to ensure MG Officer roles are contained in the cross-campus ballot for the March 2018 election.
February 2018 – March 2018	First cross-campus ballot for MG positions and first MG officers directly elected. Analysis of the result of this should be carried out post-Election.

Appendix Two – Statement to Council (08/11) based upon CSPB deliberations (01/11)

The memorandum is as tabled, and has not been altered following the previous consultation at CSPB. I will take a short time to outline in short the key points raised by the consultation last Tuesday.

- Management Groups are largely seen as an administrative part of the Union as opposed to a representative part, with their sole function to represent the voices of clubs and not their members. In that case, the current system is valid, but I believe with a more visionary outlook for Management Groups, there is a case for the expansion into member representation as well, with the creation of bespoke welfare and diversity officer roles to take charge and expand College and Union campaigns such as Imperial Girls Can. I have asked DPCS to be invited and included in the Management Group Reform focus group to make my opinions on this matter heard, as it was tangential to the meeting.
- The issue of ‘tribalism’ – with international and sports societies considered, the issue of people voting as a bloc with the intention of ‘voting for mates’ was considered to be a negative point against the proposed paper. As an extension of this, expansion of the franchise for Management Groups risks the marginalisation of smaller clubs. In practice, I can see this being an issue, but I believe it raises questions of treating the voters with greater respect. My proposed paper would make a move towards a Union electoral system that more closely approximates what we see in the propaganda – one where ideas, and the propagation of ideas to improve the student experience, are considered more important than if your friend is running for a particular position.
- A good aspect of AGMs is the personable nature by which candidates can connect more effectively with their constituent Chairs. As a Union volunteer who has done the Union’s Volunteer Qualification, I understand strongly the need to engage with all stakeholders in the decisions we make as officers, and this is definitely a good avenue for this. However, this is something that can equally well be done during the handover period for new Chairs, and helps reduce the need for AGMs, since that connection would be retained through Ordinary Meetings.
- Populism was raised as an issue – people promising stupid stuff in order to win votes. This is something that is expressly advised against in the Candidates materials. Also, if this were a significant issue, there is a case for the reduction of voting membership for almost all officer roles, including Constituent Union Presidents. When you also look at the campaign run eighteen months ago by Lucinda Sandon-Allum for Union President

against a candidate who was populism incarnate, we see that populism rarely wins the day in the current electoral system. I largely disregard this argument.

In terms of the principle of Student Voice, I believe that the ordinary membership of clubs can offer the best mandate for the actions of Union Officers. However, based upon the feedback received so far, I have been convinced that the current system of One Club One Vote can be made to work more effectively. In terms of a change that could be made to the voting membership, I am of the opinion that a change to a system where the three Key Officers of each club, namely the Chair, Treasurer and Secretary, each have a vote, expands the voting membership and develops the mandate of the MG Officers whilst retaining the knowledge of the inner workings of the Union.

Taking on board the feedback of the CSPB meeting last Tuesday, the provisional outcomes of my proposal will be as follows:

- Nominations for the position of Management Group officers will be held through eVoting, in keeping with the fact that every member of the Union can run for these positions. However, voting shall remain by AGM with OCOV, if no change occurs to the voting eligibility.
- These positions will be worked into the Union publicity for the election period, encouraging experienced officers of the Union to consider running.
- Voting shall be expanded to Treasurers and Secretaries, to provide a broader base of votes.
- A Union Governance official, such as the Returning or Deputy Returning Officer, shall be required to oversee all MG AGMs to ensure the election rules are upheld and to provide a higher legitimacy to the result. This will require a change of Standing Orders to ensure the change sticks, as otherwise the only record of this discussion is minutes of Council and CSPB.

The unadulterated memorandum's proposal shall be incorporated as a parallel set of Resolves, and the role of Council will be to vote on which set they prefer. Each set of resolves shall be voted on separately, and the set with the highest vote in the affirmative shall become the direction of the Union moving forward.

If anyone has any further suggestions regarding this, I propose a 10-minute guillotine motion from the end of this speech during which time all concerns regarding the memorandum and what I have just said can be raised. I believe, given the consultation already had at CSPB, this is sufficient.

Thank you for your patience, I am open to your questions.