

Memorandum – Initial Thoughts on Management Group Elections Reform

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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 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.