# HSU Democracy Referendum 2024

## What’s Going On?

Hallam Students’ Union is holding a referendum to find out if students are happy with our proposed new approach to gathering student opinion and setting the Union’s priorities. From 4-7 March 2024, all Hallam students can vote in the referendum, to say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to our proposals.

## Why are we holding a Referendum?

At Hallam Students’ Union, we want to be led by students in everything that we do, so that we know we’re working on, and lobbying the University on, the issues that are important to you. Under our current model, students are elected to the Union Council, where ideas are discussed and passed into Union policy.

To see if there are better ways to find out what students want us to work on, we collaborated with an expert on Students’ Unions called Nick Smith. You can find out more about Nick on his website: <http://nicksmithconsulting.org.uk/>.

With Nick’s help, we spoke to a variety of students about how they’d like their views to be represented at the Union. Around 1,700 students fill out our Democracy survey, and around 60 students attended focus groups in November 2023.

As a result of that work, Nick & the SU team created a range of recommendations that aim to improve how we act on student feedback. The recommendations have been approved by the Trustee Board of the Students’ Union, including the Officer team. Now, they need to be approved by students in a Referendum. For the proposals to be approved, at least 1,500 students need to vote, and at least 75% of the responses need to be ‘Yes’.

## What would we like you to do?

We would like to tell us if you’re happy for us to go ahead with the proposals. You can do this by voting ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ in our Referendum.

You can read more and vote here: <https://www.hallamstudentsunion.com/referenda/>

## What exactly are the proposals?

Our research highlighted that the average Hallam student in 2024 doesn’t have the time to engage with our current model, which is a more ‘traditional’ model that assumes students have a lot of free time to engage with volunteer roles with the Union.

Therefore, the proposal is to move away from a model where individual students volunteer as representatives of different groups and interests, to one where all students can contribute to and influence the Union’s priorities, and comment on how the Union and its representatives are achieving those priorities. The Union would use existing interactions with students, such as through Societies and Reps, as well as active outreach and research, to find out what matters most to students.

The below table shows what we asked during the review, and what we’re proposing to do to try and improve.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What we wanted to find out** | **What our proposal recommends** |
| How the Union finds out what students think should change or should be prioritised | Using the Union’s student research activity as well as outreach, Course Rep feedback and statistics from across the Union  |
| How we decide which course of action the Union should take | Elected Representatives (ie SU Officers) set policy four times per year, based on research and discuss with students at working groups  |
| How the Students’ Union makes change happen for students  | Officers and SU staff work on policy priorities which are set based on research and feedback |
| How our members can evaluate our actions  | Students can attend working group meetings, where they can help to prioritise work and hold Officers accountable for their actions  |
| How we can ensure the interests of diverse groups of students are taken into account  | Working Groups include Education, Wellbeing and Student Life, and minoritised and Liberation groups have memberships of those groups. |
| How we can make our democratic model inspiring and engaging for our members  | Model seeks to meet students where they are through existing Union engagements rather than asking them to engage with a separate democratic structure.  |
| How we can ensure that our processes don’t put excess burden on time and resource-poor students |
| Innovative ways to use technology to allow all students to participate in our democratic model  | Model would be open to use online tools (eg surveys) to develop policy and communicate issues.  |
| How our democratic model should interact with other Union activity, such as Academic Representation and Societies.  | Reps and Societies will feed into Working Group activity, alongside feeding into policy forming process. |
| How we can ensure that the Union’s values of Passion, Honesty, Dedication, Innovation and Diversity are embedded in our democratic model  | Consideration of diversity would be a key area for the policy development body. A simplified process would hopefully be more transparent and have greater space for innovation as the way in which data is collected can be more diverse.  |
| How our democratic model can empower students to make decisions within the context of the Union’s wider strategy  | Policy development process would consider existing Union strategy to ensure they inform each other. |
| The remit & scope of some Officer priorities/roles/duties  | Priorities set with working groups and so impact the role of officers. A greater emphasis is placed on them engaging with students to gather information.  |
| How our Officer team supports, and is supported by, our democratic model, and reviewing their current role descriptions on this basis |