

## **By-Law (9): 'Developing Policy'**

*This by-law sets out what ideas and policy are in a YUSU context and what our guiding principles are; who has responsibility for decision-making, development and implementation in relation to student ideas and policy; and how students can participate in policy development at YUSU.*

### **What are Ideas?**

1. Ideas are statements that describe students' interests, what they want and need.
2. YUSUuggestions describes the process by which ideas are submitted, categorised and developed into policy or taken forward as simple actions.

### **Guiding principles**

3. Participation should be simple and accessible to all students
4. Our approach is dynamic; students can share their ideas and perspectives and receive a swift response from their officers. Students can share practical ideas for swift action or work with officers on developing transformative approaches to substantive issues.
5. Promotes student participation in YUSU decision-making, priority-setting and the development of broad beliefs on key policy issues of the day.
6. Focus is on the formative processes of consultation and development as well as the summative moment of approval.
7. Provides opportunities that are educational and offers experience of critical deliberation, involvement in decision-making and influencing change for students.

### **Ideas Forum**

8. The Ideas Forum has responsibility for policy at YUSU. Its role includes deciding whether ideas should become policy or not, consulting students on ideas, developing ideas in partnership with students and implementing them as policy.

### *Composition*

9. The Forum is chaired by the Union President and is an extension of YUSU's [Officer Group](#), which is made up of all YUSU Sabbatical Officers and Part-time Officers. To ensure a diversity of perspectives and participation in the decision-making process, the Forum will include Reps from key areas of university life: Colleges, GSA, sports,

academic representation and societies. The Forum will work on the basis of one vote per role. Where a role is covered by two students and they cannot agree on a given decision, an automatic abstention will be applied. Members of the Forum will be:

- Union President (Chair)
- Academic Officer
- York Sport Union President
- Student Activities Officer
- Community and Wellbeing Officer
- Working Class and Social Mobility Officer(s)
- LGBTQ Officer(s)
- BAME Students' Officer(s)
- Disabled Students' Officer(s)
- Environment and Ethics Officer(s)
- Womens and Non Binary Students' Officer(s)
- Mature Students' Officer(s)
- International Students' Officer(s)
- RAG Officer(s)
- Volunteering Officer(s)
- GSA President
- College President x2 (One Hes East/ One Hes West)
- York Sport Union Committee Representative
- Academic Leadership Team Representative
- Activities Representatives (for selection by Societies Committee and Media Committee)

10. Members will be appointed by the relevant representative groups for an academic year. They may also be removed by the same group.
11. Individuals cannot hold multiple positions on the Forum, for example Academic Leadership Team Representative and Activities Representative.

### *Meetings*

12. The Forum will meet on a monthly basis during term time.
13. Meetings will be open to Union Members unless the Forum decides to take any

sensitive or confidential business on a closed basis, which can be decided by a simple majority vote, at any time.

14. Meetings may be held online and will be open to Union Members, subject to digital safety measures being put in place.
15. Forum members that do not sit on Officer Group will be able to nominate a representative to attend Forum meetings in their absence, or where it would be more appropriate for another person to attend.
16. Quorum for meetings will be 12 (50% plus 1)

### *Responsibilities*

17. The Ideas Forum are primarily responsible for:
  - 17.1. Promoting YUSUggestions and the policy process to their Networks and to the student body more widely.
  - 17.2. Categorising each idea that comes through the YUSUggestions platform; deciding whether the idea is an 'action' or a 'policy proposal'
18. Formulating a consultation plan for ideas that have been categorised as policy proposals. Consultation methods may include, but are not limited to, a written consultation, face-to-face events, debates.
19. Leading on and delivering student consultation activities for ideas categorised as policy proposals.
20. Consultation will be the principal responsibility of Officer Group. Other Forum members may be designated to support with consultation activities and will be expected to support engagement with their constituencies, where appropriate.
21. The following members of the Forum are responsible for consulting with the groups listed:
  - 21.1. Academic Officer
    - Academic representatives and leaders (e.g. Faculty Reps, Department Reps and Course Reps)
  - 21.2. Student Activities Officer
    - Societies & associated Coordinating Committee (Societies and Student Media)
  - 21.3. Community & Wellbeing Officer
    - College Welfare Reps
    - Supporting Campaign Networks to consult effectively
  - 21.4. York Sport Union President

- Sports clubs
- College sport teams
- College sport committee
- York Sport Union Committee

21.5. Union President

- Consulting external bodies e.g. Colleges and the GSA
- Supporting anyone consulting with a target group to reach them effectively
- Collecting feedback from the wider student body

21.6. Part-time Officers are responsible for consulting their network members and committees.

22. Evaluating information from consultation activities, gauging support for a given proposal and then deciding whether more consultation is required or whether the policy should be rejected or become an active YUSU policy.
23. On a case-by-basis, deciding whether a policy proposal should be put to a referendum.
24. Developing policy ideas with students and creating action plans.
25. Implementing policy ideas, with students and relevant YUSU staff.
26. Reporting to the Forum and the student body on the progress of active policy.

## **Ideas**

27. The Union is led by its members and every member has the right to suggest a course of action, a belief or a response to YUSU's decision-making, existing policy or political direction. These suggestions shall be known as Ideas.
28. Any full member or recognised student group of the Union can contribute an Idea for the Union at any time.
29. Ideas can fall into the category of:
  - 29.1. 'Action' which are straightforward ideas that have a simple solution and are quick to action.
  - 29.2. 'Policy proposals' are wider topics where there is value in exploring the range of student opinion and potential options. This exploration can be done by consultation led by Officer Group and/or by holding a debate.

## *Process*

30. All Ideas will be submitted via the online platform 'YUSUggestions' on the YUSU website. There will be a designated email contact for any issues that might arise

with YUSUggestions.

31. All Ideas will be reviewed by the Student Voice Team before being published on the website. Ideas will only be prevented from being published if:
  - It may present a risk to the reputation to the Union - e.g. if it contains language or content that may cause offense or be deemed discriminatory
  - It may present a legal risk to the Union.
  - It mentions names or personal details about someone.
32. Ideas published on the platform will be put live for voting where any full member of the Union can vote and comment on any idea.
33. Some ideas may not be put to a student vote for the following reasons:
  - 33.1. The Union President deems the idea unfeasible to achieve due to:
    - The resource or cost implications of the idea
    - The idea is not in line with the reputation or standards of the Union
    - The idea goes against the governance or responsibilities of the Union e.g. contradicts the YUSU by-laws, Articles of Association, UK Charity Law, the Charity Commission, the Union's Code of Practice with the University.
  - 33.2. The idea is materially the same as an existing policy, idea or officer manifesto point which is already being worked on.
34. Where students dispute decisions about their ideas presenting risk or being deemed unfeasible, the Trustee Board - as the ultimate decision-making body, will be asked to make a final ruling.
35. Ideas that are put live for voting are required to have received net 25 positive votes (vote threshold) by the end of 30 day voting period to be deemed a supported idea. If an idea does not meet the threshold in the allocated time frame it is categorised as unsupported.
36. Supported ideas will be taken to the Ideas Forum on a monthly basis for the group to decide on whether they are 'Action' or 'Policy proposals' based on criteria (see below).

#### *Idea Criteria*

37. Actions
  - Simple ideas which have a quick to action solution
  - Material items/requests

- Ideas that do not require wider consultation

38. Policy proposals

- Policies can be developed into campaigns, projects and can direct the work of YUSU's Officers.
- Policies also set out broad beliefs, that guide the work of the whole of the Union

*Decision outcomes*

39. Action

- 39.1. A Sabbatical Officer will be assigned to the idea and will respond to the proposer, on the SUGGESTIONS platform, with their plan for working on the idea. This will be done in an appropriate time frame.
- 39.2. The Sabbatical Officer will also keep the proposer and student body up to date on the progress of implementing this idea, by adding additional feedback on the SUGGESTIONS platform.
- 39.3. If, after beginning work on the idea, it is found that the idea is not currently achievable due to unforeseen or external circumstances, the action may be put on hold and resumed when circumstances allow. The proposer and the student body will be informed of this.

40. Policy Proposal

- 40.1. Once categorised as a 'Policy proposal', the Forum will decide if an idea will either be taken for student consultation and/or a debate will be held on the topic.
- 40.2. The proposer will be informed on the SUGGESTIONS platform that their idea has been taken for further development and they will be invited to meet with a Sabbatical Officer or member of staff to discuss this further.

**Consultation**

*Purpose of consultation:*

41. To understand people's views on and support for an issue, idea etc.
42. To explore how policies, projects or new activities, would impact student communities
43. To understand conflicting beliefs or values around issues, ideas etc.
44. To inform and educate and to stimulate interest in specific issues, among students.

### *Process of Consultation*

45. The Forum will make a consultation plan and/or designate Consultation Leads to develop bespoke plans - with support from the Student Voice Team and input from the submitter of the initial idea, where applicable. Plans should consider the following:
  - The purpose. What are we trying to achieve? Who do we want to involve? Are there any groups that might be particularly impacted and/or interested.
  - Set clear expectations. What are students expected to contribute? What questions are being asked and why. How will student contributions inform what we do.
  - What activity or combination of activities will be recommended - e.g. written, online and face to face opportunities for students to express their views.
  - Capture feedback - how will it be recorded and how will it be used.
  - Share the results and next steps with participants and the wider student body.
46. A briefing will be communicated to all students describing what is being consulted on and providing contextual information around the topic.
  - 46.1. The aim at this stage is to provide students with balanced, objective information which, where relevant, challenges their understanding and preconceptions to assist them in understanding and responding to the policy idea and any possible alternatives.
  - 46.2. The briefing will also highlight the main points of concern, contention or interest on which the Forum would particularly like to receive feedback and student perspectives.
47. Any student will be able to provide feedback. If they do not fall within a group that is specifically consulted, it will be clearly promoted that they can send their feedback to the Union President or most relevant Sabbatical Officer.
48. Supported by the Union staff, the Consultation Leads will collate and write up the feedback they have received and circulate to the rest of the Forum. The Forum will then meet to evaluate the feedback reports and make decisions on each of the ideas.

49. If the Forum establishes support from the Networks, Groups and wider student body, they will consider whether to make the idea active YUSU policy. They will work with the submitter on the final wording.
50. The Forum is empowered to take decisions, yet it should consult to understand and be fully informed of the views of Student Members before taking decisions.
51. If the Forum believes an idea is particularly divisive or contentious and/or the feedback does not yield a clear direction of travel, they could decide to trigger a referendum. Over 50% of the Forum would have to be in agreement on referring a policy idea to referendum.
52. The Sabbatical Officers will report the decisions made by the Forum to the student body, outlining the outcome of the consultation and why the ideas have been supported or rejected.

### *Types of consultation*

#### 53. Debates

- 53.1. Debates can be held as a way of collecting student perspectives on a specific idea when:
  - Where ideas involve complex issues, uncertainty or potentially contentious values/beliefs
  - Where the implementation of an idea would require trade offs between different options
  - Where policy and decision-makers lack the experience or viewpoints to enable them to make a robust decision and expert input may be required - e.g. from union staff, students, University colleagues
  - Where Officers are undecided
- 53.2. Debates do not necessarily have to be binary - 'for or against', 'yes or no'. For example, there is clearly value in discussing how we address structural racism in Higher Education, but it would not be appropriate to have a 'for' or 'against' in this context.
- 53.3. Debates can develop recommendations or options, develop an agreed view and inform decisions.
- 53.4. Can be used alongside other forms of participation - e.g. a written consultation
- 53.5. Can be used at any point in the policy/ideas cycle:



- When an issue is initially identified (through SUGGESTIONS). The purpose here would be agenda-setting/framing the conversation
- To support the setting of recommendations and ideas for specific issue/policy
- Planning key elements - setting outcomes and how to achieve them
- During implementation, dialogue could be used to monitor and review

54. Deliberative workshops

54.1. Deliberative workshops - facilitated group discussion that provide participants with the opportunity to consider an issue in depth, challenge each other's opinion and develop their views to reach an informed end position.

54.2. They could take place online or face-to-face

54.3. Workshops will give the Forum and Consultation Leads a greater understanding of what may lie behind group or individual opinions and/or how students' views change as they are given new information and deliberate on an issue with other students.

55. Written consultation

55.1. Written consultations are designed to engage with students to gather intelligence, ideas, viewpoints and experiences in relation to ideas submitted.

55.2. A written consultation asks that students read the ideas submitted, including the accompanying contextual information, and then respond to set questions that emphasise key areas of interest and potential actions.

### **Policy Development and Implementation**

56. The aim at this stage is to develop and realise the objectives outlined in the initial idea submission and through the consultation process.

57. All ideas that are passed as YUSU policy will be assigned to a relevant Sabbatical Officer, who will be responsible for developing a plan outlining how the policy will be developed and recommendations for how it will be implemented - i.e. what practical activities will be proposed, including keeping the Forum updated.

58. Where possible, the development of the plan should be deliberative - involving the initial proposer of the idea and the students most likely to be interested and/or impacted by the policy.

59. The plan may be dynamic. So it might firstly be presented to the Forum as a development plan (including plans to consult students on activities or to commission research), with implementation recommendations added later.

60. Sabbatical Officers are required to update the student body on plans, activities and decisions made in relation to active YUSU policy.

### **Active Policy**

61. Active YUSU policy should be available for all students to view and access on the YUSU website.
62. All new policies will be added to the website as soon as practicable
63. Policy shall exist for three years
64. No Policy Idea of substantively similar content to any current Active Policy may be referred to the Policy Process
65. If an Idea is submitted which substantially contradicts the content of any Active Policy, it will be referred to the policy process for consultation with areas of contention highlighted to ensure students are given the opportunity to discuss contradictions and the Forum can make a judgement on the feedback.