How to Organise your Network Open Meeting

Key Terms

Network Constitution	A document that sets out the rules and regulations for a Student Network.
Student Council	The highest student representative body of the Union. It sets the Policies of the Union and holds the Executive Committee to account.
Executive Committee	The three Full Time Officer Trustees of the Union. It oversees the representation and campaigning work of the Union, as well as the implementation of Policy passed by Student Council and the Ideas Forum process.
Policy	An idea that student/s, submit to Student Council, which they believe will improve the student experience. Once passed by Student Council, policies are binding for three years so the Union must ensure they are progressed during that time, often by working with the University to effect a change somewhere

Students may submit relevant policy motions (a proposal for a policy) to Network Open Meetings for them to discuss and vote on. If the Network approves the policy, it will then be sent to Student Council for discussion and approval. |
Consensus Decision Making	Consensus decision-making is a group decision-making process in which group members agree to support a particular decision or course of action which they feel to be in the best interests of the whole group or in order to achieve a common goal. The decision is one that can be supported or acceptable to all even if it is not the most preferred course of action for every individual.
Quorum/Quoracy	The minimum number of people needed at a meeting to be able to conduct business (carry out votes etc.).
Hustings	A meeting at which candidates in an election can meet students and answer questions from potential voters.

As representative student groups it is important that Networks are communities that encourage open dialogue and build consensus. This will help ensure that the

committee is able to represent its members effectively. A key tool that enables the Network to achieve this is an Open Meeting.

So, what is an Open Meeting
An Open Meeting is a meeting of all the registered members of the Network. Its purpose is to discuss issues of relevance to the members of the Network and where appropriate approve policy to be taken to Student Council on behalf of the Network.

Decision making in at Open Meetings will, as far as possible, be consensus based. Where consensus is not possible, decisions can be agreed by a simple majority vote.

When should you hold an Open Meeting?
The Committee will need to organise two Open Meetings per academic year. The first meeting should be completed by the end of the first semester, but we would recommend that it is held in late October or November.

The second Open Meeting should be completed by the start of the Easter break. Having the meeting before Easter will allow for a handover period before the end of the academic year.

You should set the dates for your Open Meetings at the start of the academic year and inform the Student Communities Coordinator so that the Union can promote them for you. In the run up to meeting we send an invite to your members at least 2 weeks before it is due to take place - you can do this by posting on Facebook and sending an email to them all. This invitation needs to include details of:
- The date, time and location (virtual if you wish) of the meeting.
- how members can submit a proposal for a new policy (set a deadline at least 3 days before the meeting so you can send submitted policy to members before the meeting).

Don't forget you can hold more than the minimum of two Open Meetings if you wish.

What happens an Open Meeting?
The Chair will lead the Open Meeting (or if they aren't there, the Vice Chair should take their place).

The Committee members can report on what they've been up to since the last Open Meeting and at the second meeting of the year the Vice Chair must report on the Network's finances. This report will need to be submitted to the SU at the end of the year.

Someone, usually the Vice Chair, will need to take notes (minutes) of what is decided at the meeting. This should be made available on your mini site on the SU website no later than two weeks after your meeting is held. A copy should also be sent to the Student Networks and Volunteering Assistant.

Setting Policy and Deciding on What is Important to the Network

Deciding what is important to members and proposing policy that the Network wants to submit to Student Council is an important way of getting the Network's voice heard and should be a key focus of your Open Meetings.

It is up to you as a Network to decide what is important to you and you may not want to submit a policy at every Open Meeting. You may decide to focus on discussing a campaign you want to run independent of the rest of the SU or you might want to discuss other activities you want to do with your members. You could theme your meetings, this might help you have more effective discussions. Think about having a workshop style open meeting as this might help stimulate discussion.

We do recommend that you try to submit at least one policy per year to Student Council (note this is not mandatory). The committee may want to propose policy to members but it is important that the committee gives all members the opportunity to submit their own ideas. You can find a template policy proposal document in the Network's Committee Hub.

Tips for Submitting Policy:

- Make sure your idea clearly states what you want to change and why – things like how it would be funded, who it would apply to. Think about three things:
    - Facts: What is the issue you're trying to address? What do we already know about this issue?
    - Impacts: How does this issue affect students, and in what way? Is it negative?
    - Reacts: What would you like the Students' Union to do to address the issue? How do we need to take it forward?
- Give as much detail as possible. If you don't it could be rejected by students for being too vague.

Deciding on Policy

Where possible decisions should by consensus. Consensus decision making is a creative and dynamic way of reaching agreement in a group. Instead of simply voting for an item and having the majority getting their way, a consensus group is committed to finding solutions that everyone actively supports – or at least can live with.

By definition, in consensus no decision is made against the will of an individual or a minority. If significant concerns remain unresolved, a proposal can be blocked and prevented from going ahead. This means that the whole group has to work hard to find win-win solutions that address everyone's needs.

You can find out more about consensus decision making at https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/shortconsensus.

Top Tips for Consensus Decision Making

Consensus is about co-operation between equals. The exact process that groups use may vary, but putting these values in practice will always be the key to making consensus work.

Explore your differences. People often shy away from conflict or get into arguments to prove they're right. However, the key to finding win-win solutions is to understand all the different needs and perspectives before forming a proposal.

Be very clear when you make a decision so everyone goes away with a shared understanding of what has been agreed. Before finalising a decision, test to check there really is agreement.

If the Open Meeting cannot come to a consensus then it should decide the policy by majority vote (where 50% plus 1 of members vote in favour). If the vote is tied then the Chair has the deciding vote. You should follow the principles laid out in Points 74-80 of Bye Law 4.

PLEASE NOTE: Policy submissions should not lead the SU to act illegally or outside of its charitable objectives of the organisation.

Can you invite guests to your Open Meeting

Networks may invite the Union's Officer Trustees (Full-Time Officers) to attend each Network. Officer Trustees will be observers to the meeting unless they are members of the Network.

Networks may also invite guest speakers and Union staff to attend open meetings, as the Chair feels appropriate. Networks are subject to the Union's guest speaker policy which can be found on the Union's website.

The Student Communities Coordinator may attend to support the committee.