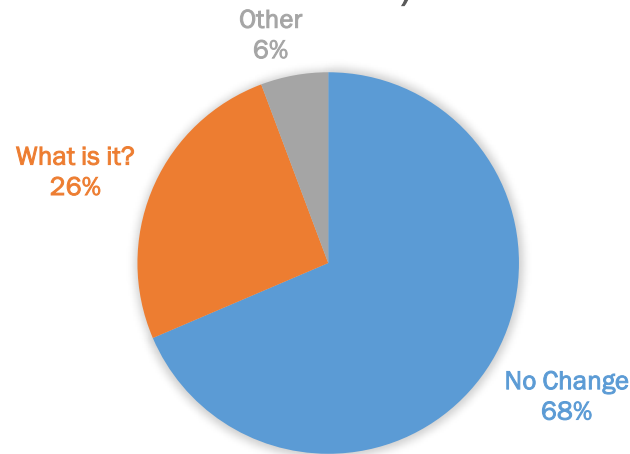


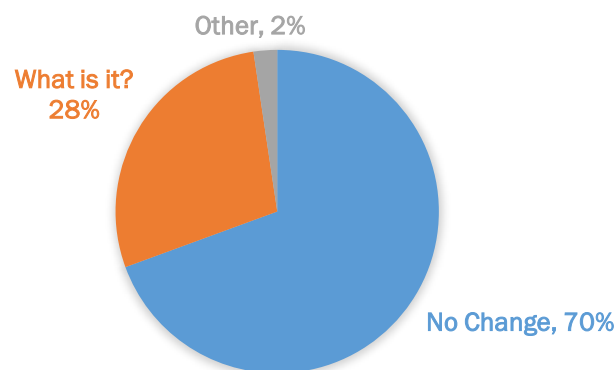
# Student Senate 2018 Review

## Membership:

### WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE STUDENT SENATE? DO YOU THINK IT SHOULD CHANGE? (CATHAYS CAMPUS)



### WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE STUDENT SENATE? DO YOU THINK IT SHOULD CHANGE? (HEATH CAMPUS)



In quantitative surveys, handed to students throughout December and January, students from both the Cathays Campus as well as the Heath Campus appear to be broadly happy with the way that the Senate currently functions (68%, 70%). These comments ranged from “a good number of people”, to “It’s perfectly reasonable for students to elect senators who have additional responsibilities”, through to “I was not aware of student Senate but after reading about it I think it’s good”. While some of the responses elaborate more than others with regards to the specifics, these are all positive comments that imply the Senate does not need changing in the election process.

However, with regards membership many students (28%) surveyed took the opportunity to vocalise that they did not know what the Senate was or did. Many students were “unsure” and “didn’t know much about this”. On two occasions, students commented “I had to google to know what it was...” which implies that Senate engagement is less than commonplace.

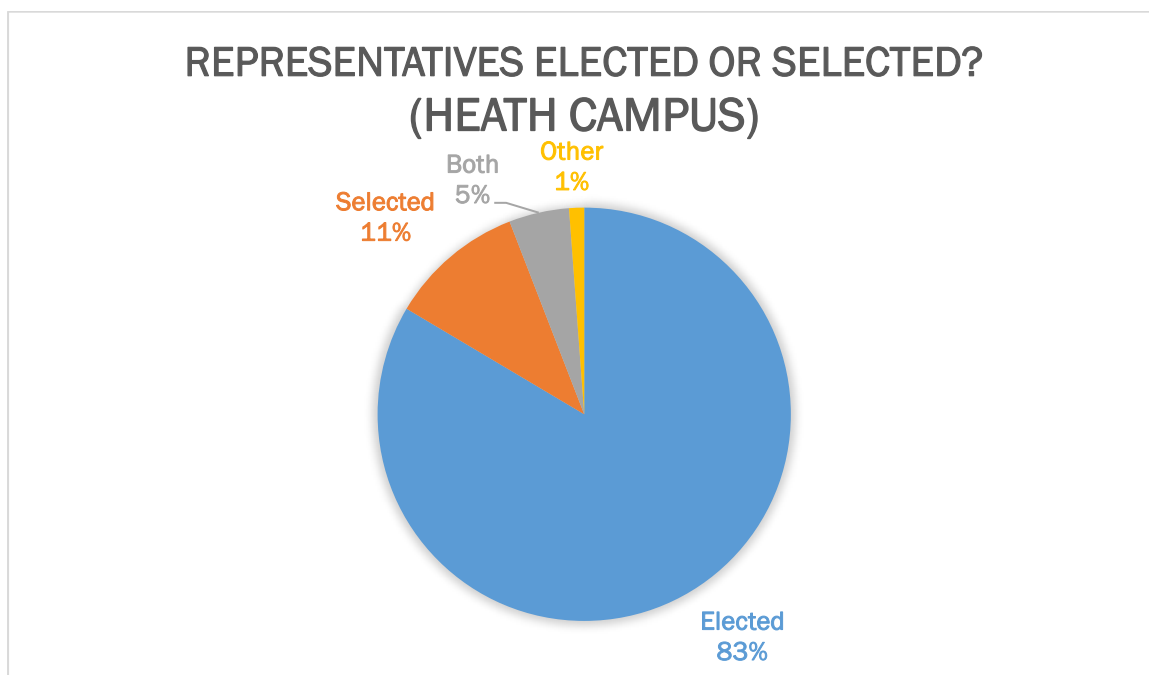
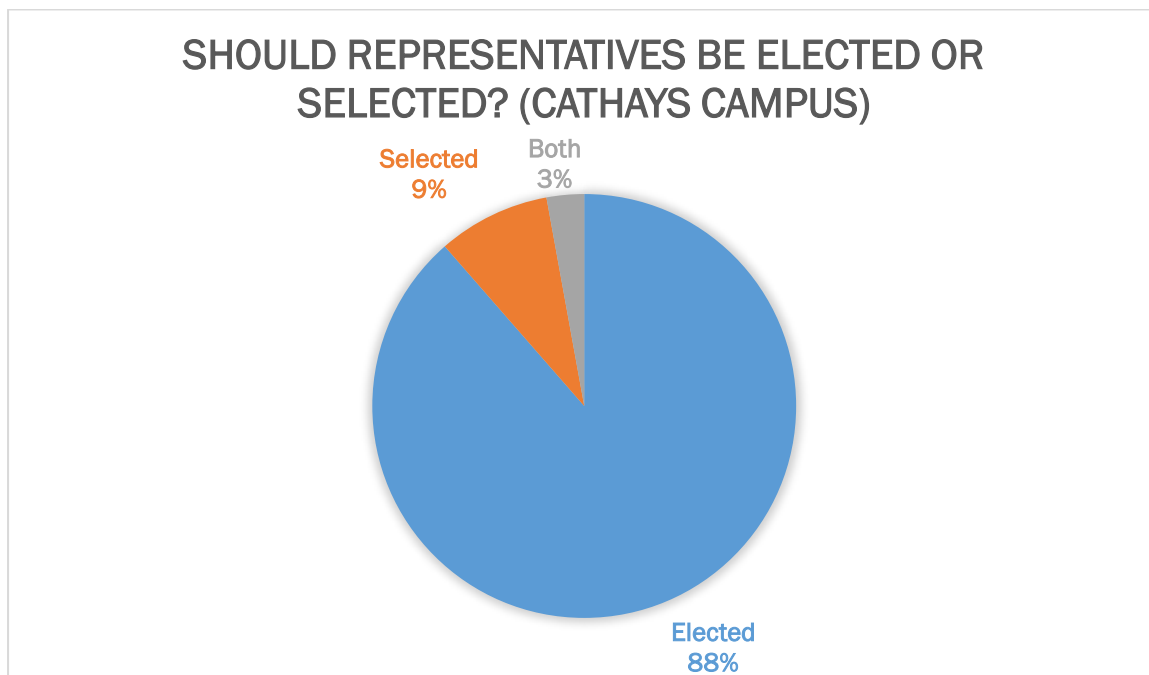
This is worrying for two reasons, firstly if students do not know that they are being represented, it follows that the Senate may not be truly representative of the student body. In addition, if student Senate awareness is low then the variety and quality of new senators who are interested, engaged, and want the best for the student body will also be low. In the qualitative data, brought out through focus groups, it was commented upon that the Senate lacks diversity, and that the people it attracts are not necessarily representative of the student body, with most members already politically and ideologically engaged.

In the focus groups, further concerns were raised. Senators who attended suggested that some motions brought before the Senate have not been as constructive as they could be. This is not helped by all proposed motions being accepted for discussion, which it was claimed can lead more towards ideological conflict than helpful debate.

This raised a further issue, however, as there would have to be an individual or council that decided the validity of motions, and would lead to increased bureaucracy in the already saturated Senate. Ideas for this were put forwards, suggesting either the chair of the Senate or a sabbatical officer, however there were issues raised over impartiality. Nonetheless, Senators would feel more comfortable having someone to confirm that their motions were possible and feasible. Furthermore, the introduction of a template for motions was discussed to aid Senators and to show to their peers that their motion is fully thought through and achievable.

The input of the sabbatical officers was raised from the sabbatical officership themselves. One member explained that for a number of Senate proposals there was no need for it to go through the Senate. For example, when students were lobbying for the introduction of ale in the Taf, this went through the Senate as a motion, when the sabbatical officers could have been approached directly and get this implemented sooner, as they would have to action it anyway.

## Elected or Selected:



Regarding Election or Selection, the senate currently has the two options moving forward. Firstly, election, which is already in place invited students to vote on their chosen senator(s) . Secondly, selection of senators would require interviews and other selection methods, as opposed to the current system, although it is uncertain who would carry out the selection process. A third option was raised in a small number of questionnaires, particularly from the Heath Campus sample,

which suggested entirely random selection: “As long as it is completely unbiased then random selection is best”. The issue, as this respondent mentioned, is that the process must be unbiased but also representative of the student body.

The need for the Senate to be student led is a large part of this section. If the senators are selected, then it may not be said that the process was student led unless students had chosen the senators, which is essentially an election. As such, from a student-led, democratic perspective, there must be some level of electioneering to take place.

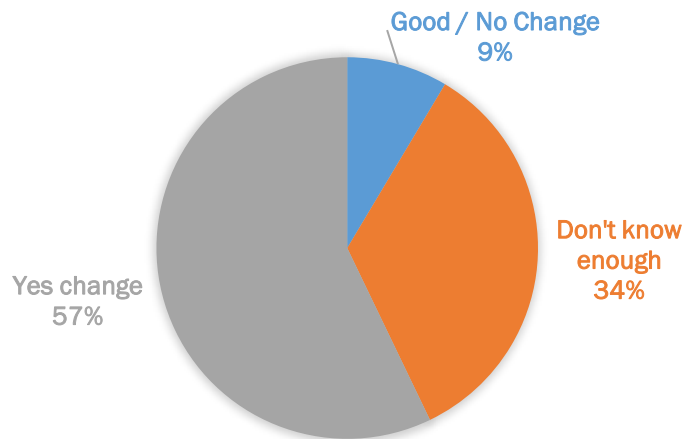
However, this year there were not enough female candidates to the senate which achieved more votes than the option to Re-Open Nominations (RON). A selection process would, to some extent, help this become more achievable. Qualitative data also suggests that if a semi-selected approach were taken, then the positions would become more competitive, in turn prompting stronger manifestos and more driven candidates who engage with the student body during the election process.

It was also in this area that the focus groups discussed the elections themselves. It was felt that the autumn elections do not get as much attention and publicity as those in the spring. While over 4,000 students voted in the spring elections, it was anecdotally mentioned that only 700 students chose to vote in the senate elections. While the possibility of combining these two voting seasons, and having only one election week per year, it was felt that those in their first year of study would not be able to vote for their senators and would therefore be underrepresented. On the other hand, would it be better to have high engagement from all but first years, or low engagement when including them?

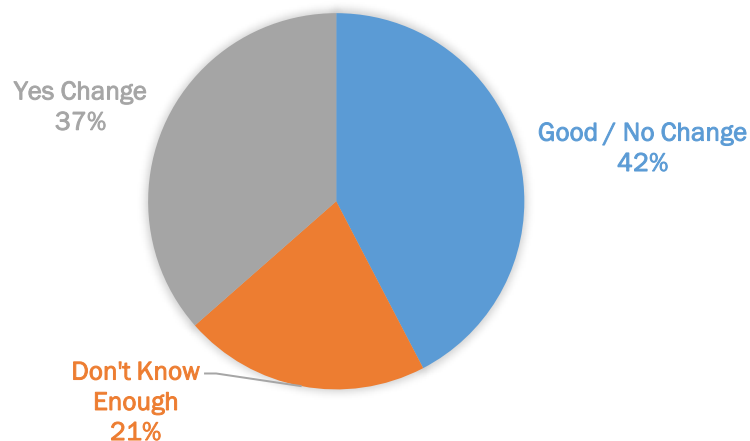
Once again, in the surveys distributed to students from both campuses, the results vary little between the two. This shows that students do value their democracy and representation and like to express this through their right to vote. Although some students (9% and 11%) chose that they preferred a selected method of Senate selection, it is unclear as to if they are referring to selection by random sampling, or to an interview process selection system.

## Feedback Method:

### WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE WAY WE FEEDBACK SENATE INFORMATION? SHOULD IT CHANGE? (CATHAYS CAMPUS)



### WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE WAY WE FEEDBACK SENATE INFORMATION? SHOULD IT CHANGE? (HEATH CAMPUS)



The survey data varies hugely when addressing senate feedback. While the majority (57%) of students at the Cathays campus wanted the way that the Senate information is fed back to be changed, only 37% of Heath students agreed. This is because the proportion of students that felt that no change was needed was 42%, vastly different to the 9% of Cathays students which felt the same way. While no dramatic insights can be gathered from this data, this perhaps shows that students at the Heath were either more receptive to current feedback methods, or that they are actively seeking it out. However, this seems not to be the case as 30% of Heath campus students were unaware of what the Senate was before the survey was distributed.

Those students that did wish to change the way that communications are delivered recommended two approaches: Social Media and Emails. Out of these students that made recommendations, 65% specifically stated that contact via e-mail would be best. In this

approach, students commented that “you can read it when you want to” and suggested that this would take the form of a “newsletter”. Alternatively, 35% of students who made a recommendation pointed towards Social Media, either by “VPs Facebooks”, or even the implementation of “a page” to communicate directly from the senate to the student body.

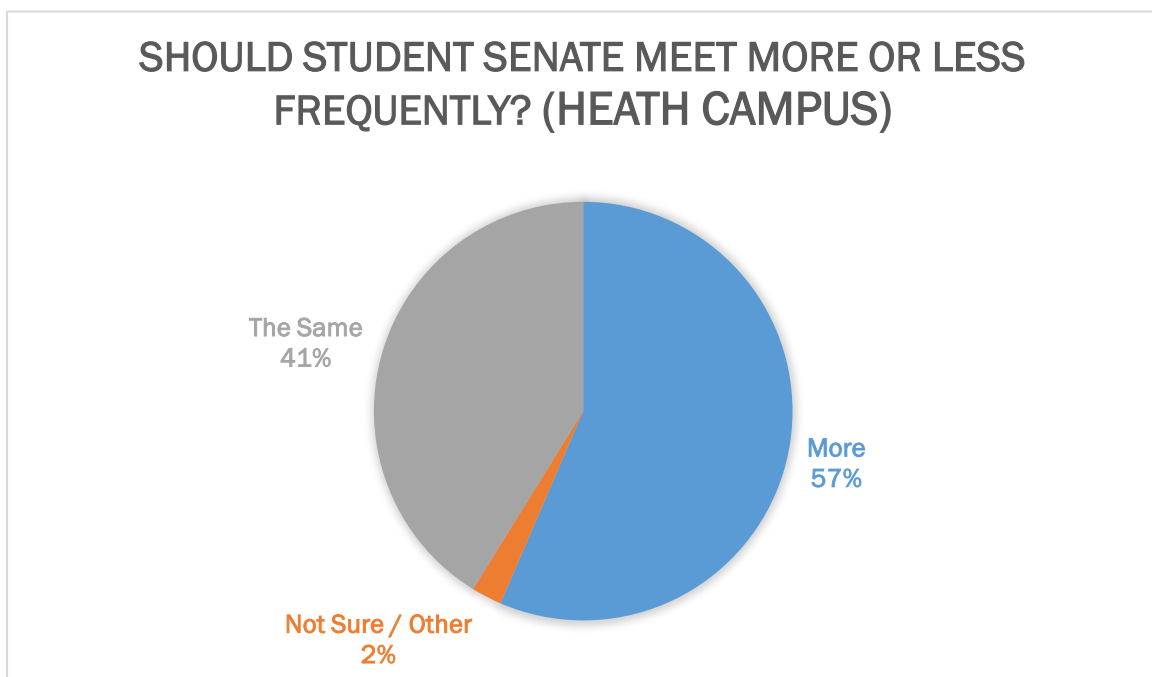
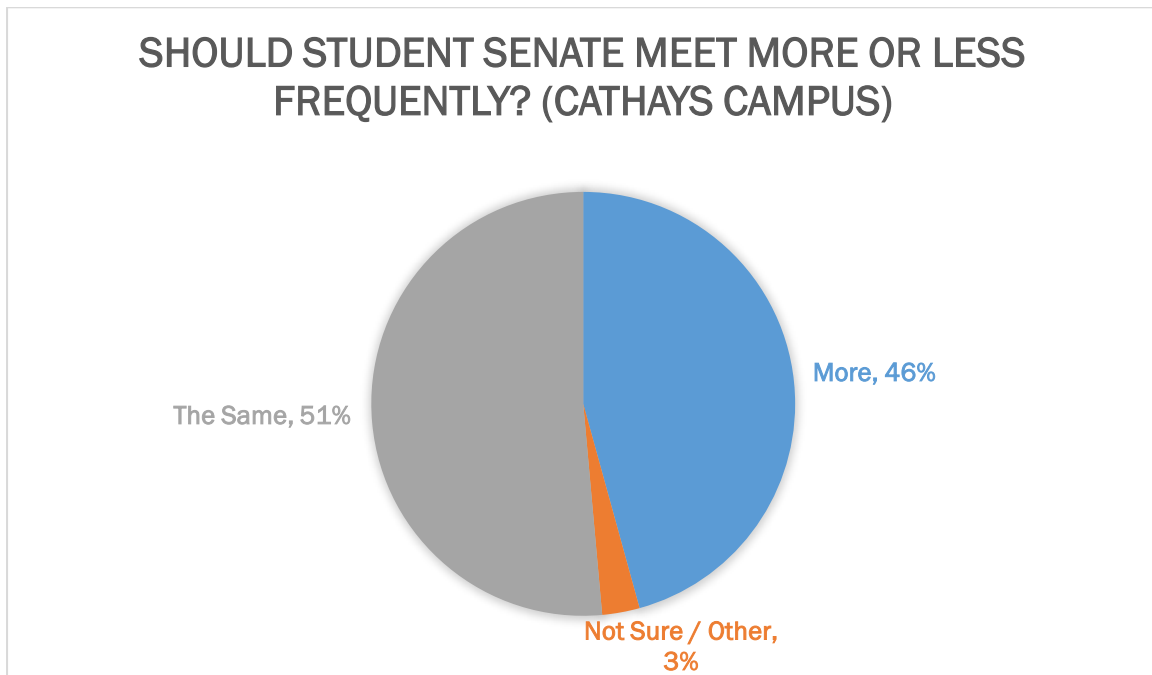
In focus groups, it was considered a given that the Senate had to feedback information more effectively. Three methods were outlined: email, in person, and physical posters. While the three methods do differ, all groups mentioned that a unified approach from multiple directions had to be undertaken to raise awareness, and thus representation.

For an e-mail approach, mention was made that students should not be flooded with e-mails, as this can be counter-productive. It was made clear that these e-mails should not be too long that students lose interest and that it would need a personal touch.

Regarding in person feedback, this was generally suggested as a method of engaging students at the start of their time at Cardiff University, either during induction lectures or to promote the good things that the senate has achieved over the previous year.

Finally, the use of posters around the Students’ Union to improve visibility was briefly suggested. These could be paper posters in strategic areas, or using the rolling screens on the stairway to show the upcoming and previous motions to make the Senate more engaging and positive.

**Meet more or less frequently:**



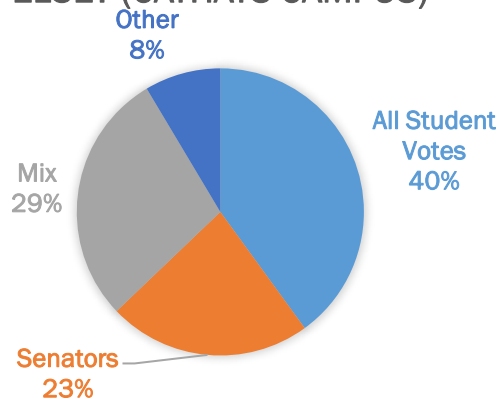
21% who said more indicated specifically at least 6 times a year.



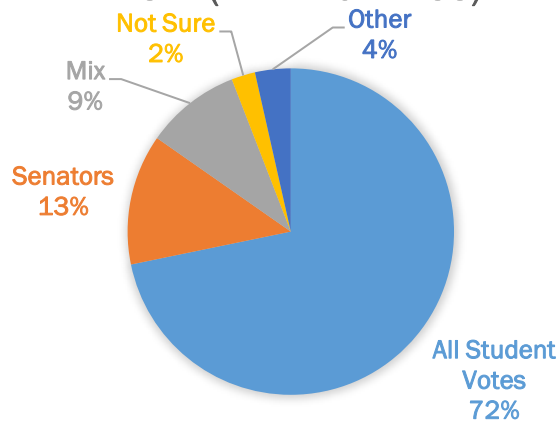


## How should policy be decided?

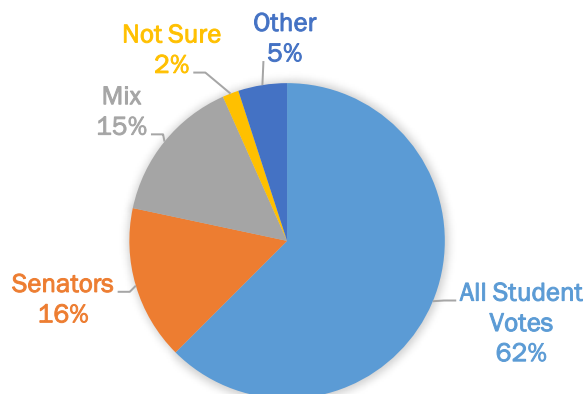
HOW SHOULD POLICY BE DECIDED? ALL STUDENT VOTES, A MEETING OF SENATORS OR SOMETHING ELSE? (CATHAYS CAMPUS)



HOW SHOULD POLICY BE DECIDED? ALL STUDENT VOTES, A MEETING OF SENATORS, OR SOMETHING ELSE? (HEATH CAMPUS)



HOW SHOULD POLICY BE DECIDED? ALL STUDENT VOTES, A MEETING OF SENATORS, OR SOMETHING ELSE? (BOTH CAMPUSES)



Within the survey data regarding how policy should be decided, students tended to gravitate towards one of three options, which will be discussed below. However, these are radically different data sets from the different campuses, and as such requires some level of explanation. In the Cathays campus, over half of students (52%) expressed that the involvement of senators on some level is necessary for the creation of policy, which is heavily contrasted to the Heath's response of only 22% saying the same. Instead, the Heath students suggested that all student voting would be a better system, potentially taking the role of senator away but increasing democratic representation as a result.

All Student voting is far more popular at Heath campus, and the comments associated with this are useful to explain why. Students commented that all student votes are necessary because "otherwise it doesn't always speak for a whole body of people", and that "everyone to have an opportunity to vote if it concerns all students". Even at the Cathays campus the point was made that "this is who it affects". Perhaps the Heath campus' geographical location has moved students to be more inclusive of all students, and to allow a greater say to all students, in comparison to those who are already regularly in and around the Cathays Campus.

Approaching the mixed section is problematic, as many of these comments do not specify whether senators or students would be the predominant approach in policy creation. Are students looking for the current senate, but with voting on larger issues from the student body, or should all student votes be supported by Senators? Looking at the combined results, if we were to take the approach that the electorate leads the Senate, then 77% of students could be said to support an electorate led system. On the contrary, only 31% of students support Senator led involvement. The reality is likely somewhere in-between the two, and the free text comments support this. Students suggestions varied from "Mixture of both, possibly online polls where students can vote and would contribute a small percentage to the overall vote", to "Vote by the senate then on big changes an all student vote", and alternatively "Student votes but controlled by senators". Overall, it can be said that while a number of students do see the appeal of a mixed system, this is far fewer than those that support a singular method of policy creation.

A meeting of senators remains a choice, however, with 16% of all responses indicating this as the preferred method of policy creation. This would continue the current system. There were very few comments at length regarding senator votes only, which perhaps suggests how these respondents would prefer for Senators to "get on with it", outside of the electorate's direct control. To keep the senate representative, students must vote for them to take office, which one respondent summarised succinctly: "A meeting of senators, as not enough students would vote". This is one of only three free text comment that was made in conjunction with Senator voting, the other two took the time to express how they agreed with the random selection of students which are in attendance at the Senate meetings.

Meanwhile, the focus groups heavily favoured a move to an online forum. This was described as a page containing motions that were submitted by students or senators, which could then be voted on once per student as either up, or down. Motions would either need a certain number or proportion of net 'upvotes' for this motion to reach the Senate for debate. This would enable every student to have a vote, "Mature students at home, nursing students that commute, and actually led by students as opposed to a bunch of 18 year olds in the senate who are out of touch".

Would the student body vote on these motions? The focus groups tended to believe that they would, as long as there was enough significance given to publicise them. There was concern that if any student were able to submit ideas, then there would be a temptation to 'troll' with outlandish and unachievable ideas put forward to the Senate, however there could be systems

put in place to prevent this. An alternative was academic representatives having the power to submit motions, as students tend to interact with them far more than any Senators. The final option was to keep it to the Senate itself, and to only allow Senators the opportunity to submit motions, however there was concern that this would not be a drastic enough change.

# Senate Consultation

The Senate were, on their meeting of the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018, approached with three options:

- Proposal 1      Online Vote, followed by Student Senate Vote
- Proposal 2      Online Vote becomes the Policy-making body
- Proposal 3      Online vote, followed by Student Senate votes – with increased in randomly selected students

## Proposal 1:

Proposal 1 involved student submittal which would then be either upvoted or downvoted over the course of two weeks. If a certain amount of upvotes were reached by the motion, then the submittal would be taken to the appropriate decision-maker to debate and vote on it.

The comments raised regarding the first proposal were generally negative. This was not a negative reaction because of the weight that the proposal carried, but instead focussed on the number of students that the proposal required.

While the initial proposal has suggested that 500 students must 'upvote' a motion to achieve discussion in the senate, this is something which could be approached on a trial basis or vary as the level of student engagement with the new system is judged. A number of senators specifically suggested between 200 and 300 upvotes to be more appropriate. This all leads back to concerns surrounding student engagement. As one senator put it "[I] don't trust just students", and others suggested that 500 votes would be "too ambitious".

However, other senators felt that this proposal would be for the best, suggesting a trial run. Another commented that "Proposal 1 ... allows students with a greater understanding to control what should or should not be passed."

## Proposal 2:

Proposal 2 involved student submittal which would then be either upvoted or downvoted over the course of two weeks. If a certain amount of upvotes were reached by the motion, then the submittal would become Students' Union Policy.

Again, the comments were generally negative, with only three senators favouring this method. One senator stated that they liked the proposal, and another indicating that Senators are "not representative of the whole student population". A final comment was made explaining how this is the only Proposal with facilitated direct democracy. They suggested five reasons for this:

1. Fairest System
2. Rapid
3. Decreases Apathy
4. More Changes
5. Cut out the 'middle managers'

However, most senators felt that policy requires active debate, and wrote strongly that they would like the senate to be maintained. Some found this "risky", others stating that students would not have the same priorities as the senate do, and that it "gives too much power to people who are not really involved in policy making". A final senator wrote that an online system would be "too bureaucratic, with "too many forms of voting", and a "high chance of no motions passing".

Another issue raised was that moving the control of policy away from the senate may encourage “joke” or “meme” submissions, or that some students might ‘spam’ the submissions page. It was for this reason that one senator called the Proposal “risky”.

### Proposal 3:

Proposal 3 involved student submittal which would then be either upvoted or downvoted over the course of two weeks. If a certain amount of upvotes were reached by the motion, then the submittal would be taken to the appropriate decision-maker to debate and vote on it. In this Proposal, the Senate is joined by an increased number of randomly selected students.

This suggestion was the most popular. Senators described the Proposal as “The most sensible” of the proposals, with the introduction of more randomly selected students seen as “more inclusive and [giving] higher exposure”.

There were some questions over whether these additional students would attend as there is “already a lack of engagement with students”. In answer to this, suggestion was made that a small payment should be supplied to these students. Another suggestion was that society representatives should be included. A further number of comments were made suggesting that Proposal 3 should be trialled.

## Recommendations:

With the above data in mind, the Student Senate is presented with three models to promote student engagement and to streamline the Senate process.

### 1. A Fully-Online System, whereby the student body becomes the policy maker:

This approach would move the policy creation process off of the Senate, instead allowing the Student Body and the Electorate to vote directly on issues and motions that matter to them.

All students would be allowed to submit ideas and motions to the [cardiffstudents.com](http://cardiffstudents.com) website, which would then be considered over a 24 hour process to determine how realistic they are and to prevent trolling or ridiculous motions being submitted. Students would then be invited by monthly emails, or another alternative method, to upvote, downvote, share and comment on each motion.

Motions would require a certain net milestone to be reached before they were enacted.

### 2. The Online system is used to gather votes, which is then followed by a senate vote

This approach would move the policy creation process off of the Senate, instead allowing the Student Body and the Electorate to vote directly on issues and motions that matter to them. These votes would determine what would be discussed at regular senate meetings.

All students would be allowed to submit ideas and motions to the [cardiffstudents.com](http://cardiffstudents.com) website, which would then be considered over a 24 hour process to determine how realistic they are and to prevent trolling or ridiculous motions being submitted. Students would then be invited by monthly emails, or another alternative method, to upvote, downvote, share and comment on each motion.

Motions would require a certain net milestone to be reached before they were presented to the Senate. Either the original proposer of the motion would be approached to present the motion, or alternatively a senator may take this role with the proposer's consent. In this model, the Senate would know that all motions discussed are of interest and supported by the student body.

### 3. An increase in the number of randomly selected students

The Senate would function as it currently does, with Senators proposing motions to the Senate. However, in this model there would be an increase in the number of randomly selected students to increase how representative the Senate should be.

It is important, however, to mention that the data does not support this as an effective model as a majority of students felt that all student votes should be the way of deciding policy. In addition, this would incur a substantial cost and time commitment to ensure participation from the increased random sample.