PROPOSED SUMMARY OF CHANGES
A New Constitution: What's it All About?

A new constitution is always difficult to understand, particularly if you’re not an expert in complex subjects like charity law and corporate governance. Which we know is almost all of you. This short guide gives you a very simple explanation of the changes we’re proposing. If you have any questions, please come and speak to any of the Sabbatical Officers in person, or drop us an email directly, as we’re keen to help you all understand why we think this will make the Students’ Union stronger and more democratic.

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It’s not ours. It's yours.

Earlier this year we commissioned a review to make sure that we are operating as democratically as possible. The Students’ Union belongs to the students at Royal Holloway and we want to make sure that students make all the big calls.

1. We believe that students should always be involved in decisions that affect them – because in our union, collectively students know best.

2. It means that we’ll come up with more relevant, up to date and innovative ideas and solutions that have been driven by students.

3. It’s a key part of our educational mission as a charity – being democratic gives students the opportunity to take part in civic activity that sets them up for later life.

4. It makes our campus community more cohesive – the more democratic we are, the more that students will feel part of the SU and the wider student community.

5. It makes us more effective and legitimate when representing students to the College, the community and the wider world – and it keeps us honest and accountable.

A. Things you told us

Over the past year, we’ve carried out a huge number of campus surveys, and have spoken to literally thousands of students to find out what you thought. This is what you told us.

1. You said that you want to be consulted more often on what the SU does - like the events we run, the prices we charge, or the things we say to the College on your behalf.

2. You told us that you don’t want to always have to stand in a public election to make a difference – you’re happy to apply for a role, fill in a survey, vote in a ballot, or talk to an SU rep about your views.

3. You told us that we should search for consensus rather than simply vote on things – that when a difficult issue comes up, we should look for the things that all students can agree on.
4. You told us that you feel a real sense of identity with your academic course – that we need to make sure the new School system enables you to have your say on your academic experience.

5. You told us that we need to provide more administrative support for students to run their own groups – that we need to be less bureaucratic and faster with our responses to you.

B. Five broad things we are changing

So we’re acting on your feedback and we’re proposing a new rule book that delivers on our promise to make the SU more democratic.

1. Creating structures and higher profile roles within schools to better represent your interests as students to the College.

2. Opening up areas of the Union to consult with students and publish their plans so students can influence, provide feedback and comment to make them better.

3. Abolishing boring and ineffective “all student meetings” and “student councils” that students weren’t coming to anyway, replacing them with different ways for the SU to find out what students think on important issues.

4. Creating lots of new student leadership positions across the SU that you can easily combine with your studies and don’t involve a campus wide election.

5. Bringing together communities of underrepresented students, to better understand them, build networks between them, and empower them to make positive change.

C. Some specific things we are doing

1. Changing the full-time student officer structure to a President and three Vice Presidents, spending slightly less on Officers so we can spend more on direct support for students and student groups. More information on this below.

2. Replacing our current Councils with three Student Executives to look after Education; Wellbeing, Community and Diversity; and Clubs, Societies and Opportunities. These will help student leaders collaborate more effectively on key issues, and will make sure Officers directly engage with a wider range of students when planning their work.

3. Introducing the role of School Reps, making them key members of the new Education Executive, and supporting them to effectively lead activities in their School.

4. Abolishing General Meetings, but creating “Policy Inquires” that will enable students to direct what the SU should do about a complex, or controversial issue. This will
involve quality research, deliberation and consultation, and may well involve a referendum at the end.

5. Creating something called “Contemporary Resolution” ballots, so when there’s an urgent, simple or clear cut issue, students get to vote on the SU’s approach. These will only be used where something may only be relevant for a limited time period.

6. Creating Service Development Groups to steer our work in key commercial areas like our venues, entertainments programme and the Union Shop. These will bring together recruited students, permanent staff, and student staff in partnership to shape what we provide and how we provide it.

7. Creating fully funded “Student Collectives” for groups of underrepresented students with specific needs (i.e. postgraduates) to increase our engagement with these students.

D. And we’re proposing to improve the way we support clubs and societies

Right now we ask two elected Sabbatical Officers (who were students last year) to provide much of the administrative support to student clubs and societies. And we know from every Rate Your Union survey that the structure isn't working. So we’re proposing to change that too:

1. Combining two of the Vice President roles into one – Vice President Sports & Societies, to lead integrated support for sports clubs, societies and other student opportunities.

2. Adding another new professional staff role to the team supporting clubs and societies, to increase our capacity for key administrative tasks (i.e. room bookings and financial payments), as well as bigger projects like event support and group development.

3. Designating the SU President the ‘Supervising Trustee’ for student media, making it more transparent and separate from the role we play supporting them in their work.

4. Replacing the old Student Opportunities Committee with a new Sports, Societies & Opportunities Executive with a wider remit, to increase transparency and give students more of a say over grant allocation for clubs and societies.
During our consultation in the spring term, a number of students raised some common questions about the proposed changes. As we said above, the Officers are keen to speak to anyone and everyone about the new constitution face to face, but here are some FAQs that might help.

1. **What caused this review?**
Since 2016 we’ve been going through a large transformation programme, which has involved changing literally everything in the Students’ Union. We’ve implemented a new strategy, rebranded, relaunched our website, created a central helpdesk for all enquiries, opened a shop and a pub, refurbished Medicine, restructured our entire approach to academic representation, and after many years of poor management, got our finances in good shape. All this meant it was time to see how we can better get students involved in everything that we do. It’s really that simple. We’re now a well-run charity, so it’s time we matched this by being a vibrant, democratic organisation.

2. **Who has led the review?**
We hired an independent consultant to help us with the work, and to ensure we listened to as many voices as possible. The project has been led by the current Sabbatical Officers, with support from staff and others too. It featured on the manifestos of all winning Presidents over the past two years.

3. **Have you consulted students much?**
Yes. A lot. We’ve spent the past year talking to literally thousands of students across campus about the issues. This has ranged from a survey, to focus groups, to one-to-one interviews. We came up with draft proposals on the back of this, and then spent two weeks in the spring term all over campus discussing this with students – including launching a website that asked for comments, and a number of open meetings with question and answer sessions. We’re convince the changes are supported by the vast majority of students, which is why we’re now keen to approve it at a referendum where every Royal Holloway student has the ability to vote.

4. **What are you trying to achieve?**
To put it very simply, we want students to both better understand how the Students’ Union works, but also, make it easier for more students to be involved in more decisions – but in a way that students want. Our current structure is outdated, students hate it, and very few actually get involved. We want to create a Union where students are at the heart of everything that we do.

5. **What does the College think about it all?**
All the proposed changes have been discussed with senior staff in the College, who support the aims we’re trying to achieve. They want a Students’ Union that represents the views of all students, but they’ve also made it very clear this is an issue for students to decide on.

6. **What are ‘Service Development Groups’?**
Very simply, these are groups of students who we’ll be recruiting to help steer our work in a range of areas where we currently lack as much student input as we need. These are:

- Events & Entertainment
- Helpdesk & Administration
Each group will be made up of students, student staff and permanent staff, and will help us make better decisions on things ranging from the Summer Ball, to the items we stock in the Shop, to how we can improve the Union App. Adverts for these roles will be online in the Summer Term ready for next year.

7. **Does this mean less representation with only four Sabbatical Officers?**
Absolutely not, quite the opposite. It’s clear to all the Officers (past and present) that the current split between Sports and Societies doesn’t work, and that particularly for the Vice President Societies & Media role, they end up spending all their time supporting the admin processes for student groups. By combining both roles together, we’ll be able to afford to hire another full time permanent staff member in the team, dedicated to things we know that clubs and societies want – faster processing of expenses, quicker room bookings, and help sorting out transport issues. All this means the Sabbatical Officer will then have the time they need to speak to groups, understanding their issues, and effectively represent them to the College. The change is supported by all the current Officers who see first-hand what a positive impact this change will yield.

8. **Why are Student Collectives separate from Student Groups?**
We’ve created Student Collectives because it’s clear there are particular groups of students on campus who have much more specific needs. We want to create a space for these students to come together, support each other, and lead work that helps both the Union and the College understand what changes we can make to improve their experience at Royal Holloway. They’re different from Student Groups because they’ll play a key role representing their students, and will have guaranteed funding and support as set out in the constitution.

9. **What is a Policy Inquiry?**
A policy inquiry is a new way we’re introducing to find out what students think about issues, when the topic is complex or more difficult to understand than a simple ‘yes/no’ decision. We’ve seen the problems that oversimplification of a topic creates on a national scale, so we’re introducing a new way for students to engage with issues. A policy inquiry will brings lots of students together to debate, discuss and decide things – but will include high quality research, the submission of intendent evidence, and a requirement to speak to students face to face. The intention is to find consensus rather than create unhelpful disagreement.