Factors to Consider when Recruiting Students for University Governance

This resource has been prepared by the USASA Student Voice team to **assist** staff and students involved in governance processes at UniSA. The USASA Student Voice team aims to provide current **best-practice** advice and support to all members of the University Community looking to **enhance** their outcomes by involving students in decision-making.

For the purpose of this document, "committee" refers to any governance or decision-making body with membership from both students and staff. This may include, but is not limited to: working groups, steering groups, councils, and boards.

Primary Considerations

Many advisory or decision-making groups at UniSA have student members. The membership might be defined in policy, or it might be the decision of a group with delegated authority, or even the establishment of a formal working group or ad hoc advisory group. In any case, the task of identifying students interested in taking on these roles is not always apparent.

When seeking to recruit students for a particular committee the following questions should first be considered:
- Is what I will be asking of the student members within the bounds of what I would feel comfortable asking myself or another staff member to do?
- Does the role require a significant contribution that requires financial compensation?
- Is there a specific cohort of students I am pitching at? (e.g. undergraduates or postgraduates, regional etc.)

By asking yourself these questions from the outset, you can ensure you appropriately define and pitch the position and begin the process of setting and managing student expectations. (For more on this, see **Setting and Managing Expectations).**

Considering these factors can also allow barriers to participation to become clear, including (but not limited to):
- Time students spend on campus;
- Timing of placements and assessments; and
- The need for students to engage in part- or full-time work whilst studying.

Compensation and Incentivisation

Despite adding value to processes and bringing unique perspectives, the reality is that student representatives are often the only committee members who are not being financially compensated for their time. This is not to say that non-financial benefits, such as experience gained or community involvement are non-commensurate in all cases, but it is an important factor to consider at the recruitment stage and an important part of managing expectations of performance and workloads (for both students and the University).

Further, although this may not be applicable to all committees, financial compensation (whether a monetary sum or in the form of a voucher) is a potential strategy to incentivise student participation and may be ethically required if the role requires significant ongoing time and work. Depending on the nature of the committee, tasks beyond just attending meetings might also include undertaking additional readings and research or gathering opinions and evidence through forums or social media surveys. The required preparation time required outside meetings should also be considered and included in recruitment communications and other touchpoints where expectations are set.

It is also important to consider the potential opportunity costs, as time invested by student representatives may be at the expense of their study obligations or part-time work. This is generally a matter for the student's own time management, but it highlights a need for timely communication of expectations and mindfulness of assessment and placement obligations on the part of staff establishing and administering committees.

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For some students, highlighting what they can gain in personal experience, networking and contributing to positive outcomes for other students may be all that is necessary. Students who are undertaking the UniSA+ Leadership and Self Development Program may be incentivised by the ability to count time in committees to their award.

Demonstrating the benefits gained, such as certification, accreditation or networking opportunities may also help to incentivise positions.

The altruistic rationale for both staff and student representatives of aiming to improve the student experience should not be underrated, but it cannot be wholly one-sided either.

Who is your target audience?

The purpose and scope of the committee will help determine the cohort best suited for the audience of recruitment processes. For example, a committee established to review current examination procedures would benefit more from a student whose courses have exams (e.g., Business) to those that don't (e.g. Journalism); even within a single Academic Unit.

On the other hand, steps should be taken to ensure that the process is not needlessly exclusive. For example, It might be assumed that students performing at a higher academic standard are better equipped to deal with complex policy decisions than those who aren't, but grades are not always a reflection of ability. Further, the experience of high achieving students may not reflect the diverse range of student voices in the cohort.

An unintended consequence of setting minimum GPAs, for example, might be that certain demographics of students that might be able to offer valuable and unique perspectives are inadvertently excluded from participatory processes. Such practices, whilst well intentioned, might merely embed homogeneity without any evidence of returns on engagement.

How will you advertise the position(s)?

Whether you have identified a particular cohort of students to target, or will be promoting opportunities more generally, it will be important for you to reach the right audience. Emails or messages on LearnOnline might be your first port of call, however students receive a high volume of communications and the noise may make it difficult for your message to cut through. Students are generally adept at filtering messages and ignoring those they deem irrelevant. This includes communications that have been designed or drafted for staff.

If you are sending bulk emails, ensure you tailor the contents for students and that your promotional material clearly states the intended recipient, e.g. "A message for third year Education Students", or "Calling all JUS Students - Panel Members wanted for Justice and Society Advisory Group".

USASA Student Voice can provide assistance in advertising your vacancies through the Student Voice website and mailing list. This list is comprised of students who self-identified as wanting to hear about opportunities to get involved in University decision-making. Staff can submit vacancies using the simple form at **USASA.sa.edu.au**/**StudentVoice** and can receive free assistance from USASA Staff about what to include.

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