

Section 12

Students' Union: Code of Practice

12.1 Introduction

This code of practice has been published by the Board of Governors of Northumbria University (the Board) in accordance with the requirements of section 22 (3) of the Education Act 1994 (The Act).

The Act requires Northumbria University (the University) and Northumbria Students' Union (the Union) to comply with a specified set of measures relating to the operation of the Union. These measures relate to its: constitution; membership; elections; service of its sabbatical officers; finances; affiliations; complaints procedure; and notification requirements.

This code sets out clearly the arrangements specified by the Board to secure observance of the Act. The code is reviewed regularly by the Board.

12.2 Constitution

The Union has been established, and conducts and manages its affairs under a Constitution approved by the Board in accordance with Article (13(i)) of the University's Articles of Government. Amendments to the Constitution must be submitted to, and approved by the Board before any such amendments can take legal effect.

The Board will review, and, where necessary, revise the constitution in consultation with the Union, every five years.

12.3 Membership

- (i) All students registered at the University are entitled to full membership of the Union, unless they choose otherwise. Every registered student at the University has the right to choose not to be a member of the Union and/or not to be represented by it, and not to be unfairly disadvantaged by reason of having exercised that right. The Union and the University will publish these rights and make them known to registered students.
- (ii) The sole consequences for a registered student of the University of choosing not to be a member of the Union are:
 - (a) loss of eligibility to vote in Union elections or referenda
 - (b) ineligibility to stand in elections to the Executive Committee of the Union
 - (c) ineligibility to hold office in any Union club or society

- (iii) Any student who wishes to withdraw from their right to membership of the Union must indicate their decision in writing to the Union President.
- (iv) Any student who has withdrawn from membership of the Union, and who subsequently wishes to resume their right to membership should indicate their decision in writing to the Union President.
- (v) The Union President will send to the University Secretary details of any student who withdraws their right to Union membership, or subsequently resumes their right to membership, within 5 working days of receiving the request.

12.4 Elections

- (i) Appointment to Executive Union Offices (and to several other Union posts) will be made by election conducted by secret ballot.
- (ii) The Union's General Manager will act as Returning Officer and will be responsible for ensuring that the election(s) are fairly and properly conducted. The Returning Officer will produce a report on the conduct of the election(s) and submit it to (a) The Student Council for approval, and (b) The Secretary to the Board, who will make it available to the Board.
- (iii) No Union member shall hold sabbatical or paid-elected Union Office for more than two years in total.

12.5 Finance

- (i) The Union, through its Executive Officers, is responsible for the proper conduct of its financial affairs, and for ensuring that the funds provided to it by the University are used only in accordance with the objects of its constitution, and in accordance with the Act, and any other applicable legislation.
- (ii) The Union shall require its General Manager (a) to satisfy the University at regular intervals to be mutually agreed between the Union and University that it is compliant with all relevant requirements and (b) to advise the Union to change any action or policy it is considering if, in the opinion of the General Manager, that action or policy is likely to prove incompatible with the terms of this Code of Practice.
- (iii) The Union must:
 - (a) maintain accounts and accounting records in accordance with normal professional accounting principles.
 - (b) maintain a sound system of internal financial management and Control.
 - (c) plan and conduct its financial affairs to ensure that its total income is at least sufficient, taking one year with another, to meet its total expenditure, and that its financial solvency is maintained.

- (d) maintain adequate insurance cover for Union assets and public/employer liabilities.
 - (e) report regularly to the University, at times and in a format mutually agreed by the Union and University, in order that the University can assure itself that proper financial procedures and controls are in place, can determine and agree its annual subvention to the Union, and can monitor expenditure on behalf of the Board.
 - (f) ensure that fair written procedures and rules exist for allocating resources to groups, clubs and societies, and that these are observed.
- (iv) The audited accounts of the Union will:
- be prepared within four months of the close of the preceding financial year. The accounts shall be approved by the Union Executive Committee and the Student Council.
 - be supplied to the Board, and be made available for inspection by all Union members, at the offices of the Student Union, during office hours.
 - and include a list of all external organisations to which the Union has made donations in the period to which the accounts relate, and a statement of the sums paid to every organisation on the list and a list of all external organisations to which the Union is/was affiliated, and a statement of the subscriptions/fees/donation made to the organisations on the list, in the period to which the accounts relate.

If the board has not received the audited accounts within four months of the end of the preceding financial year, it will seek a written explanation from the Union President, and then determine an appropriate course of action.

12.6 Affiliations

- (i) All proposals to affiliate to external organisations shall be approved by the Executive Committee subject to ratification by the Student Council, and shall be submitted for approval to the Annual General Meeting.
- (ii) The Annual General Meeting should review all current affiliations. If a current affiliation is challenged, by a minimum of 5% of the Union's members at the meeting, then a secret ballot of the members should be held to determine continued affiliation.
- (iii) A register of current affiliations, containing details of subscriptions, fees paid, or donations made, should be maintained by the Union, and available for inspection by all members at the offices of the Union, during office hours.
- (iv) This Register should be made available to the Board on an annual basis.

12.7 Complaints

- (i) Complaints by any union member in relation to their dealings with the Union, or in relation to a claim of unfair disadvantage when a student has exercised their right not to be a member of the Union, will be dealt with as follows:
 - (a) By the internal complaints procedure set out by the University's Student Handbook
 - (b) If the complainant is unsatisfied by (i) then they may appeal to a Panel of the Board
 - (c) If their complaint is still not satisfied, they may appeal to an independent person nominated by the Chair of the Board.
- (ii) All complaints will be dealt with promptly and fairly, and when a complaint is upheld there will be an effective remedy.

12.8 Restrictions imposed by the Law of Charities

The Union is governed by the laws relating to charities. The Union cannot have a political purpose and must not seek to advance the interests of any political party although it may seek to influence political opinion on issues relating directly to its own stated purposes, provided such activity is within its powers. Expenditure must be at a reasonable level, taking into account the potential benefit to union members, and the financial resources and commitments of the Union. The ways in which charities may, or may not, legitimately engage in political activities is the subject of advice and legislation by the Charities Commission, Courts of Law, Parliament, and Government departments.

12.9 Freedom of Speech

The Union and its members must observe the University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, which it is required to publish in accordance with the Education No. 2 Act 1986.

12.10 Publication of this Code of Practice

This code will be published in the *Student Handbook* made available to all students via the University's webpage annually.