

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Citizens' Jury Information Pack

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The newDemocracy Foundation
2022



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Western Sydney University, The newDemocracy Foundation and Gauge Consulting acknowledge that the land that this project is being held by various Aboriginal nations for tens of thousands of years.

We express our respect for the ancestral tie between them and this land, and we pay our respects to campus and community elders, past, present and those emerging.

We feel privileged to be invited, as the Uluru statement from the Heart states, to “walk together as one people towards a better future”

We respectfully and warmly welcome those students participating in this project who are Indigenous Australians.



Foreword from VC

Congratulations to the students selected for the Rethinking Student Representation at Western Sydney University. The project highlights the importance of student representation and participation in the University community.



Western remains committed to student success through our values of excellence, sustainability, equity, transformation and connectedness. Effective student representation and participation is a part of this commitment.

I wish you all the best in your participation in this project.

Professor Barney Glover AO
Vice-Chancellor and President

Background

This project is a response to decreasing levels of engagement between the University and the student body, including student representative roles across the University.

Students are in a busy and sometimes transitional period of their lives that reasonably places extra-curricular university responsibilities below work, study, and social past-times. Our efforts to account for this and rethink student representation are a recurring challenge with solutions traditionally drawing inspiration from existing political institutions.

These challenges are now an opportunity that Western Sydney University (WSU) is using to play a leading role in developing innovative student engagement models.

Across the globe, public authorities are increasingly using citizens' assemblies and democratic lotteries to involve citizens directly in solving some of the most pressing policy challenges. These processes give ideal amounts of time and information to a group of randomly selected everyday people and facilitate their deliberation on an issue that leads to finding common ground on a set of recommendations.

WSU is applying these methods to the University setting by choosing 32 students through a democratic lottery and giving them the right time (4 days over the course of a semester), information and incentives to work together and find common ground around recommendations for how students should have a voice at WSU.

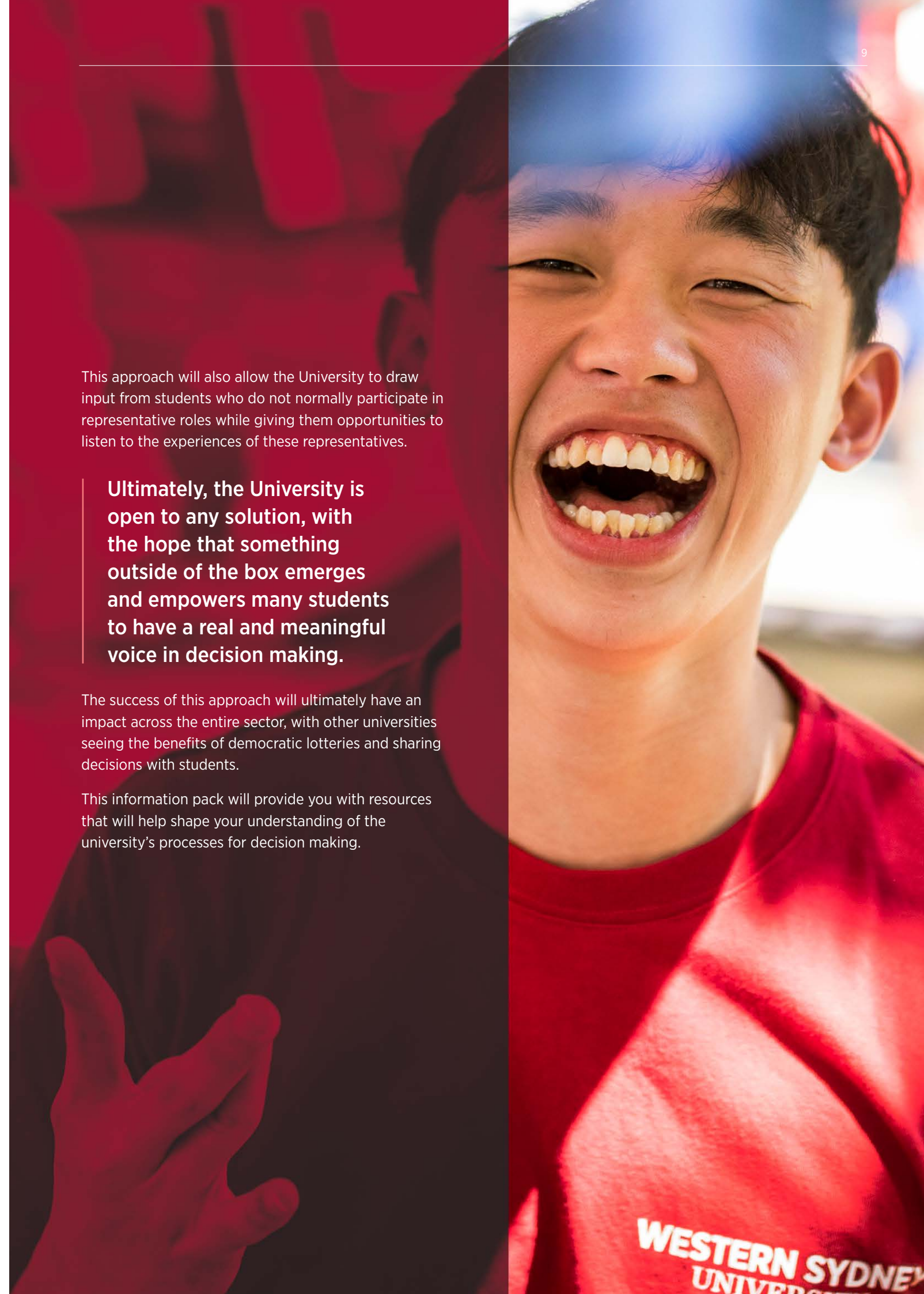
This will give students a chance to experience innovations in democracy at a time in their lives when they are becoming civic actors. The process will equip a randomly selected group with a new range of skills for youth leadership, helping position WSU at the forefront of other universities nationally on the topic of democratic leadership and student empowerment.

This approach will also allow the University to draw input from students who do not normally participate in representative roles while giving them opportunities to listen to the experiences of these representatives.

Ultimately, the University is open to any solution, with the hope that something outside of the box emerges and empowers many students to have a real and meaningful voice in decision making.

The success of this approach will ultimately have an impact across the entire sector, with other universities seeing the benefits of democratic lotteries and sharing decisions with students.

This information pack will provide you with resources that will help shape your understanding of the university's processes for decision making.



The Key Issues

The student voice is central to good decision making at Western Sydney University (WSU). Active student participation in university governance should be a core principle for any university that believes that its students are key stakeholders in higher education. Universities should be a place where younger members of the community are encouraged to be involved in governance, with the hope that this will translate to their involvement in broader issues impacting everyone.

Over the past 25 years, there has been a significant decline in engagement levels from students at Western Sydney University. The problem is complex but ultimately few students take up representative opportunities, and when they do, we struggle to retain them.

Some of the key issues impacting engagement are:

- WSU students on average, work considerably more hours than their peers at other higher education institutions. This is a significant barrier as students weigh up the opportunity cost of lost paid employment to take up representative roles.
- WSU students have usually had less exposure and encouragement to participate in formal governance and decision-making bodies when compared to peer Universities. Many Western students are the first in their family to attend a university and consequently, they will not have family members talking about their own experiences at university or their times as student representatives.
- Universities are increasingly becoming transactional, with more of a focus on getting students in and out as quickly as possible so they can start their careers. Consequently, students often forgo extra and co-curricular activities such as representative opportunities.
- There is little capacity or resources for staff who directly or indirectly support student representatives. Without adequate support, student representatives are left without the proper training, structure, mentoring and ongoing encouragement to be successful in their roles.

This lack of involvement has two major impacts on WSU:

1. The university makes decisions that, in the absence of a strong and clear student voice, miss the perspective, experience and preferences of students
2. Students miss out on a valuable experience learning how to effectively communicate, advocate and negotiate around their needs.

University decisions affecting the student experience are always better when students are meaningfully included in the conversation and actively participate and partner with the University to build and drive initiatives.

How then can we build an environment that encourages and supports students to contribute their voices to university decision making on the issues they want a say on, within and beyond the University's operations?

If students are better engaged, they could be having a real say on the structure of teaching and assessments, food and beverage options on campuses, student residences, sporting facilities, peer programs, student services, parking and shuttle buses, academic policy, and procedural reviews and more. It could mean student concerns are better addressed in University strategy, changes to campuses, SSAF bids and review procedures, and in the University's position on external issues.



The Question We Need You to Answer

All universities in Australia struggle with student engagement. Western Sydney University is no exception. Students are in a busy and transitional period of their lives that reasonably places extracurricular university responsibilities below work, study, and social lives.

The student voice should reflect the needs and interests of all students. More than 45,000 students attend Western Sydney University. Yet, the overwhelming majority of them do not contribute to the decisions that impact them.

This Students' Panel, therefore, has been convened to answer the question:

“
How should
students
have a
voice at
WSU?”

Who is running this process?

THE NEWDEMOCRACY FOUNDATION

newDEMOCRACY

newDemocracy is a not-for-profit research foundation that has been championing different ways of doing democracy through practical projects with governments at all levels. With a focus on deliberation and democratic lotteries, and with bi-partisan support from former premiers and MPs, they have run many of the largest and most controversial engagement projects nationally.



Kyle Redman

Kyle will be your primary point of contact throughout the panel process. He will have spoken to you initially to confirm your place and introduce you to the project, and he will effectively be your manager throughout.

He is a Project Manager at the newDemocracy Foundation. Having joined newDemocracy in 2017, Kyle has designed and managed several of newDemocracy's major projects, including for the ACT Government, Local Government Victoria, Yarra Valley Water, Byron Shire Council, and the City of Sydney.

He has also worked with international partners to design democratic innovations in Eupen, Fortaleza and Madrid. He has also co-authored the United Nations Democracy Fund handbook Enabling National Initiatives to Take Democracy Beyond Elections, and recently published the book The A, B & C of Democracy.

GAUGE CONSULTING

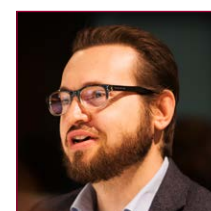


Scott Newton

Scott is the independent facilitator for the panel. His role is to work with you to help you explore the issue and develop recommendations together. He's independent so that you do not have to worry about being 'led to' an answer by the University. Instead, you have someone experienced in facilitation and deliberation who can help you through the tough parts of finding agreement with a room of strangers.

As a facilitator and stakeholder engagement strategist, Scott has worked across government and industry, corporate and not-for-profit, to define key challenges and – through carefully designed workshops and other engagement tools and activities – engage stakeholders to co-design solutions. He's worked with newDemocracy before in Byron Shire Council and run similar citizen-led deliberations for Lane Cove Council and Sydney Airport.

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



Richard Martino

Richard will be your point of contact with the University. He's the Manager of Student Community. He will work with Kyle and Scott to ensure all your needs are met, that you're provided with all the information you need and that you're confident the University will understand your recommendations.

What will happen during this process?

WHAT IS THE STUDENTS' PANEL?

The Students' Panel is a process that combines the elements of random selection (the invitations you received in the mail) and deliberation (a method for working together and finding agreement).

It draws on the increasingly popular use of [citizens' assemblies](#) to solve problems like budgeting, climate change and constitutional reform.

It is a lot like a criminal jury – you weight up and interrogate information from a range of perspectives and work together to prepare your verdict.

In this case, we're asking you to provide recommendations to the University that answer the question: ***How should students have a voice at Western Sydney University?***

These panels effectively find common ground and solve problems because they provide participants with lots of time, information, authority, support, and the right incentives.

Your role as a member of the panel is to consider all information presented to you and work together with your fellow panellists to make recommendations about student representation and engagement.

Please read the information provided in this information pack prior to the first meeting so that you are ready to participate.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THE MEETINGS?

You will be joined by around 32 other members of the student body and asked to:

-  Consider information presented to you
-  Discuss the information you have heard and read
-  Be open to other points of view and ways of thinking
-  Pose questions and request additional information relevant to the discussion
-  Work together to develop ideas and proposals
-  Find agreement on recommendations

There will be a range of activities including working in regularly mixed small groups as well as discussing issues among the panel as a whole.

HOW WILL A DECISION BE MADE?

Deliberative processes like this panel rely on participants finding common ground on a set of recommendations they can all live with. This means they typically operate with a threshold of 80% approval to include recommendations in the final report.

You won't be just voting yes/no to a bunch of options, though. You will be working with your fellow panellists to develop and refine your recommendations together so that you arrive at a report that you can all stand behind and support.

WHAT ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS WOULD THE UNIVERSITY LIKE?

WSU is open to any recommendations the panel can find agreement on. In particular, we consider the following to be some of the most difficult aspects:

- How can we best address the clash between competing interests within the University?
- What old systems need updating?
- What current gaps exist?
- What aspirations do students have for their level of influence over various areas?
- Recommendations for determining engagement approaches, tools or activities.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document is your central point for background information and key details about this project. This document poses many questions to get you thinking through the key issues at the heart of this project. It is critical that you take the time to read it thoroughly. Not reading it would be like reaching a verdict at a criminal trial without listening to the witnesses.

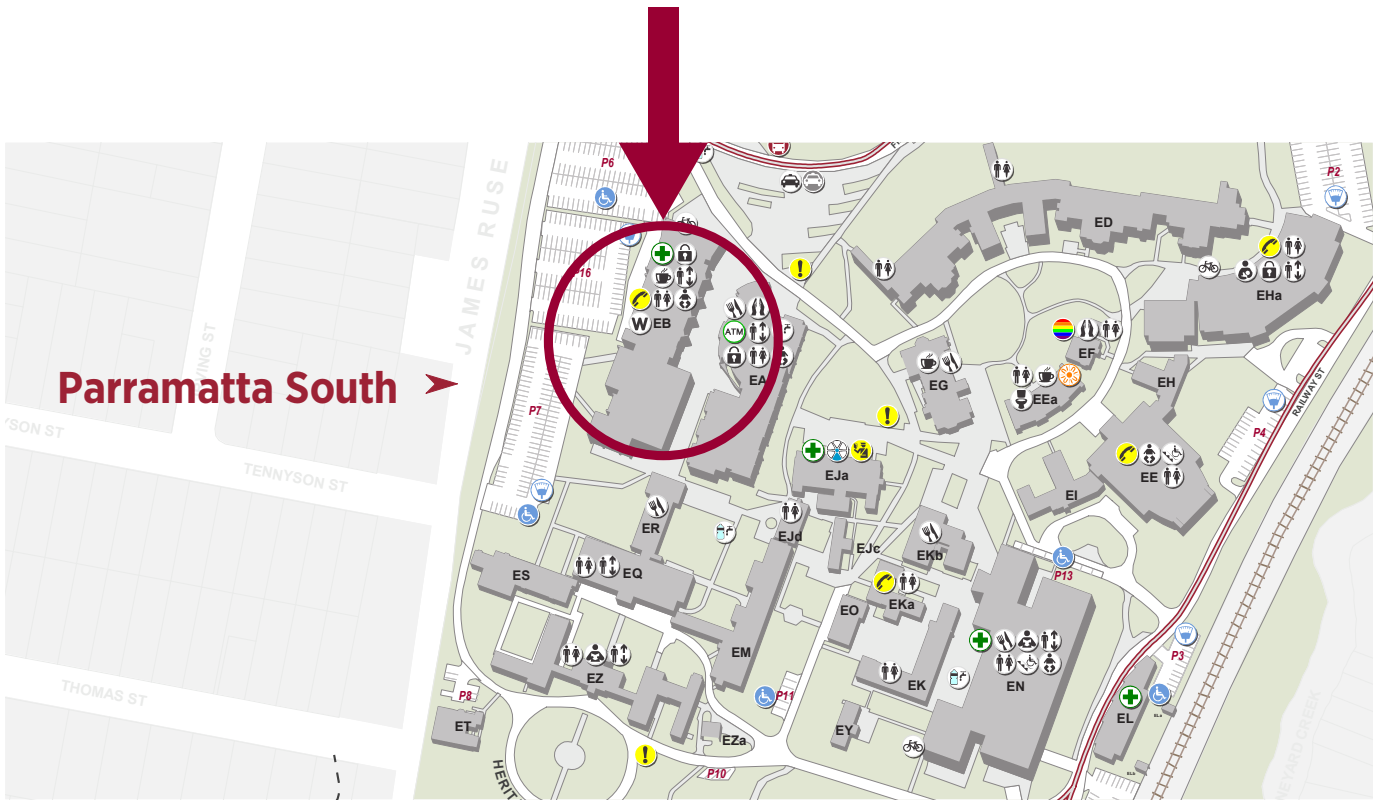
You will find references to many other documents, too. If you are looking at this online, many of the documents referred to are hyperlinked. You will certainly have questions from your reading; please bring them along to our sessions!

WHEN ARE THE FOUR WORKSHOP MEETINGS?

MARCH 5	Meeting 1
MARCH 26	Meeting 2
APRIL 16	Meeting 3
MAY 7	Meeting 4

WHERE ARE THEY?

Meetings will be held at the Western Sydney University Parramatta South Campus in EB, G18.



HOW TO GET THERE

If travelling by Train – you can travel on T1 Western, T2 Inner West, T5 Cumberland or BMT Intercity lines to Parramatta Station. You can then get a shuttle bus from Parramatta City Campus (Smith Street, adjacent to campus) to Parramatta South Campus (stopping in front of EA building).

If travelling by Car – you are able to access the carpark on Parramatta South free of charge, we will cover your costs if you do not have a blue parking permit. Please note the campus is accessible via Victoria Road, via M2/M7 or M4 to James Ruse Dr or via Silverwater Rd.

If travelling by Bus – plan your trips to Victoria Rd at Anderson Ave, Dundas (Stop ID 211611 and/or 211612). Some common bus routes are the 523, 524 and the 501.

Please allow for delays due to the redesignation of the Parramatta CBD to 40km zones and the impact of the light rail service. If in need of accessibility requirements we advise to check ahead via <transportnsw.info>.

EB is located parallel to the EA building, which are the two tallest buildings overlooking the Parramatta South Campus Shuttle Bus stop and are the most North-West buildings on the Parramatta South Campus buildings.

Essential information about Western Sydney University

What does Western's student population look like?

Western's student population is rare among university cohorts. Consider the following and what challenges or opportunities they bring to our conversation about the student voice:

- The geographic spread of Western's population, including attendance across 12 campus locations
- The large percentage of students are the first among their family to attend university
- The lower average socioeconomic status compared to other Sydney universities
- The number of languages other than English spoken in the homes of students
- The number of non-school leavers attending is greater than other Sydney universities which can also mean more caring responsibilities

For more detail, see the tables on the following pages:

Age	2018	2019	2020
Under 21	14585	14720	13965
21-24	17434	17706	17771
25-34	11363	11940	12037
35-49	4212	4196	4462
50 and above	921	944	1031
Total	48515	49506	49266

Study	2018	2019	2020
Full-time	35884	36670	36196
Part-time	12631	12836	13070
Total	48515	49506	49266

Gender	2018	2019	2020
Female	27346	28059	28307
Male	21166	21440	20945
Other	3	7	14
Total	48515	49506	49266

Campus	2018	2019	2020
Bankstown	6874	5739	5341
Campbelltown	6596	6662	6761
Hawkesbury	2614	2633	2511
Lithgow	23	0	0
Liverpool	881	1823	2139
Nirimba	2292	2374	2352
Parramatta	12326	13381	13695
Parramatta CBD	6380	6572	5758
Penrith	7224	6338	5622
Sydney City	1069	1560	1685
Any WSU Campus	23	45	25
External	158	140	108
WSU Online	994	865	1382
Online	828	868	1395
No Callista Record	1	257	46
Hong Kong	186	168	175
Vietnam	46	81	271
Total	48515	49506	49266

Parental Attainment (Domestic students only)	2018	2019	2020
University	14025 (33.92%)	14197 (34.35%)	14405 (34.85%)
No University	27327 (66.08%)	27134 (65.65%)	26927 (65.15%)
Total	41352	41331	41332

Non-English-Speaking Background (Domestic students only)	2018	2019	2020
ESB	38629 (93.42%)	38649 (93.51%)	38725 (93.69%)
NonESB	2723 (6.58%)	2682 (6.49%)	2607 (6.31%)
Total	41352	41331	41332

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) (Domestic only)	2018	2019	2020
ATSI	732 (1.77%)	732 (1.77%)	744 (1.80%)
Not ATSI	40620 (98.23%)	40599 (98.23%)	40588 (98.20%)
Total	41352	41331	41332

Low Socio-Economic Status (SES) (Domestic only)	2018	2019	2020
Low-SES	12752 (30.84%)	12738 (30.82%)	12756 (30.86%)
Not Low-SES	28600 (69.16%)	28593 (69.18%)	28576 (69.14%)
Total	41352	41331	41332

Disability (Domestic only)	2018	2019	2020
Disability	1803 (4.36%)	1860 (4.5%)	1924 (4.65%)
No Disability	39549 (95.64%)	39471 (95.50%)	39408 (95.35%)
Total	41352	41331	41332

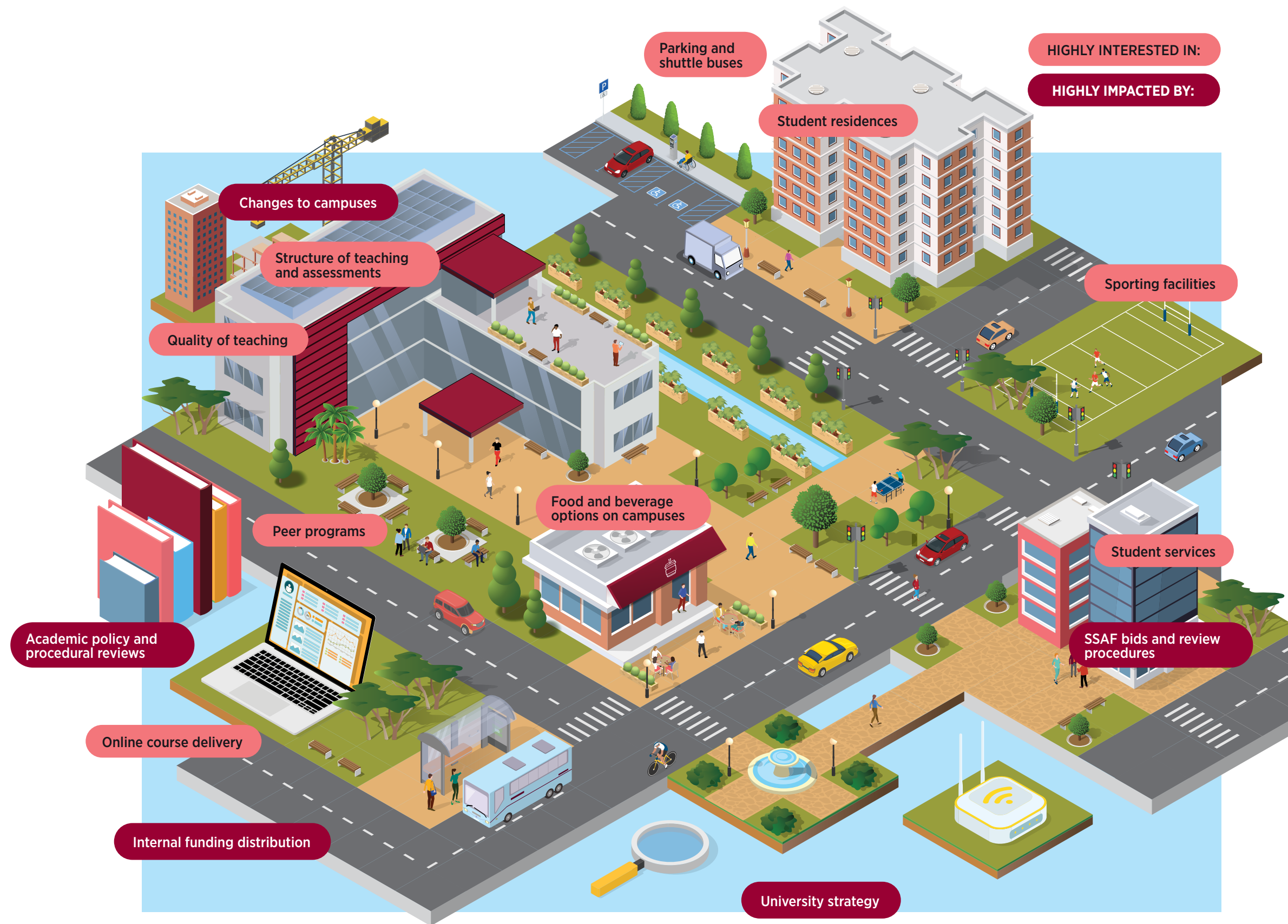
Location	2018	2019	2020
Blacktown	5221	5120	4958
Blue Mountains	1113	1051	1043
Camden	1134	1236	1334
Campbelltown	2433	2405	2456
Canterbury-Bankstown	4519	4631	4543
Cumberland	3878	3814	3722
Fairfield	3349	3390	3357
Hawkesbury	891	842	804
Liverpool	4294	4379	4532
Parramatta	1481	1447	1395
Penrith	3207	3205	3155
The Hills Shire	1953	1950	1892
Wollondilly	282	264	246
Total Western Students	33755	33734	33437

Inner Sydney	3778	3686	3594
Outer Sydney	1725	1697	1717
Central Coast	234	233	234
Remained of NSW	1200	1202	1273
Interstate	660	779	1077
Total Domestic Students	41352	41331	41332

Language Spoken at Home	2018	2019	2020
Northern European Languages	29405	28888	28704
Southern Asian Languages	5515	6233	6093
Southwest and Central Asian Languages	5134	5540	5753
Eastern Asian Languages	2704	2958	2803
Southeast Asian Languages	2793	2950	3052
Southern European Languages	800	832	806
Eastern European Languages	725	739	710
Australian Indigenous Languages	3	3	3
Other languages	965	1013	990
Non-English but no specifics	23	17	6
No information	448	333	346
Total	48515	49506	49266

Where does the student voice need to be heard?

Students often request a say in issues or decisions that are of interest to them, or which heavily impact them. The following items have been compiled from student survey responses and the engagement team's observations over several years:



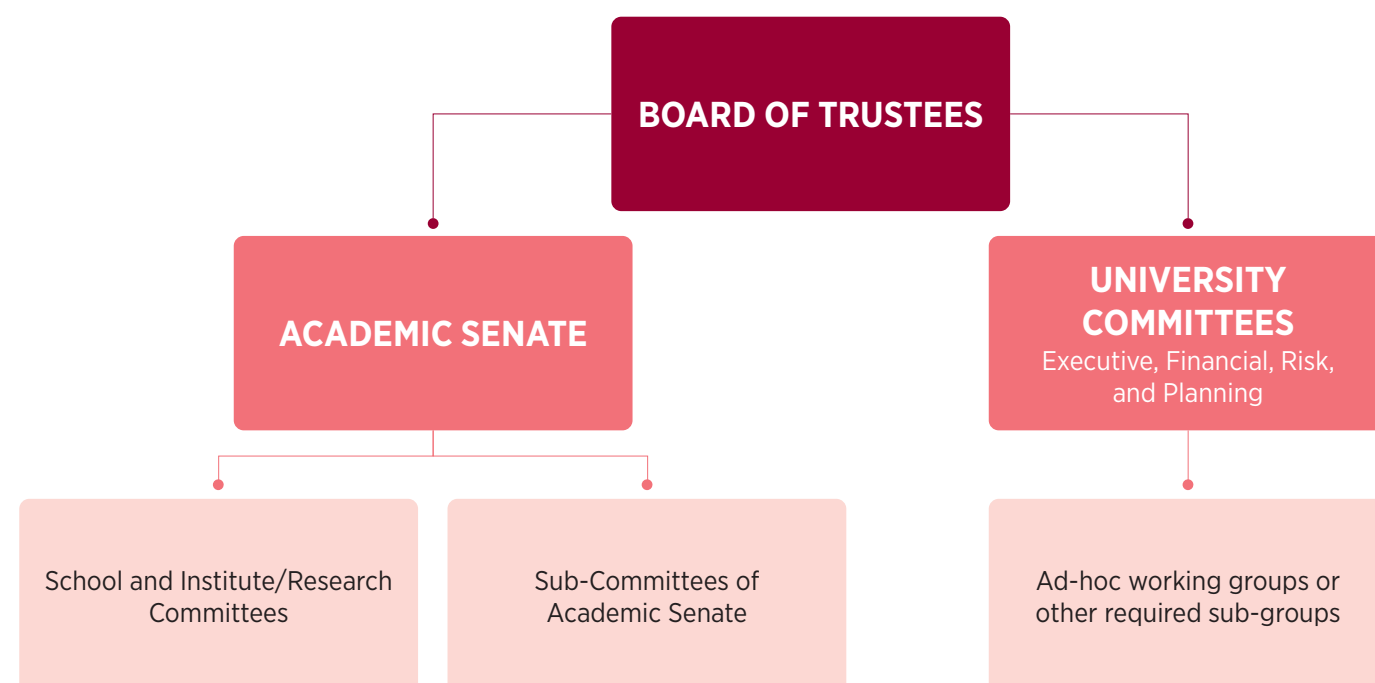
How does decision-making work at Western?

University Governance and Academic Committees

Western Sydney University, like most large organisations, is complex, bureaucratic, and often slow-moving when making decisions. Decisions at Western are more often made by a committee, which will normally sit to discuss topics that are of a specific interest area.

The Board of Trustees is the peak financial, strategy, governance, and resources decision-making body of WSU. It's comprised of elected and appointed internal and external members who contribute to the overall strategy and position of the university and is chaired by the Chancellor.

The university, however, is ultimately governed by the **Vice-Chancellor (VC)**. The VC is the most senior officer and employee of the university and heads most of the Board Committees.



The Academic Senate is the peak academic decision-making body of WSU, and its chair is elected by the staff of the university. The Chair is usually a high ranking senior academic, either Associate Professor or Professor. The Academic Senate has standing membership from all school heads, research institutes heads and relevant academic and business areas of the university, including, for example, the Head of the Library and the Chief Student Experience Officer.

It is the responsibility of the Academic Senate to report up to the Vice-Chancellor and President, and the Board of Trustees regarding decisions of the Academic Senate that significantly impact the university. However, because the two bodies serve slightly different purposes, they are both responsible for governing sub-committees on various topics to ensure appropriate stakeholders are consulted throughout the decision-making and change process.

The sub-committees of the Board of Trustees and Academic Senate normally have an appointed or standing chair from the committee above it and may often have a mix of other upper committee members and elected and/or appointed members from other areas of the university, including students. The figure above is a more simplified visual of the Governance Structure table, the full version of which can be viewed [here](#).

The committees are responsible for regularly meeting to discuss and decide on making recommendations as appropriate to the Academic Senate and/or Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees committees report to the VC.

Academic Senate and Committees take responsibility for:

- Monitoring academic standards, values, and quality assurance.
- Advising on the development of and performance against academic plans.
- Monitoring academic collaborations and partnerships.
- Promoting and monitoring academic quality, standards, and values of the University's academic activities.
- Advising on the University's academic plans and academic risk management.
- Advising the Board and Vice-Chancellor and President as appropriate.
- Deciding academic policy and approving related procedures.
- Accrediting and approving courses, programs, and units.
- Promoting the quality and development of research in the University.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

Student representatives are also elected to represent their fellow students in various committees throughout the University. The responsibility of the student in the meeting is to advise the committee on the student perspective of various items or issues that the committee is responsible for discussing. Students on committees are involved in the decision making of academic policy, courses, subjects, development of research, and academic plans. Usually between 1-4 students are responsible for attending their respective committee's meetings, which are held on a regular basis.

List of relevant student stakeholders and networks

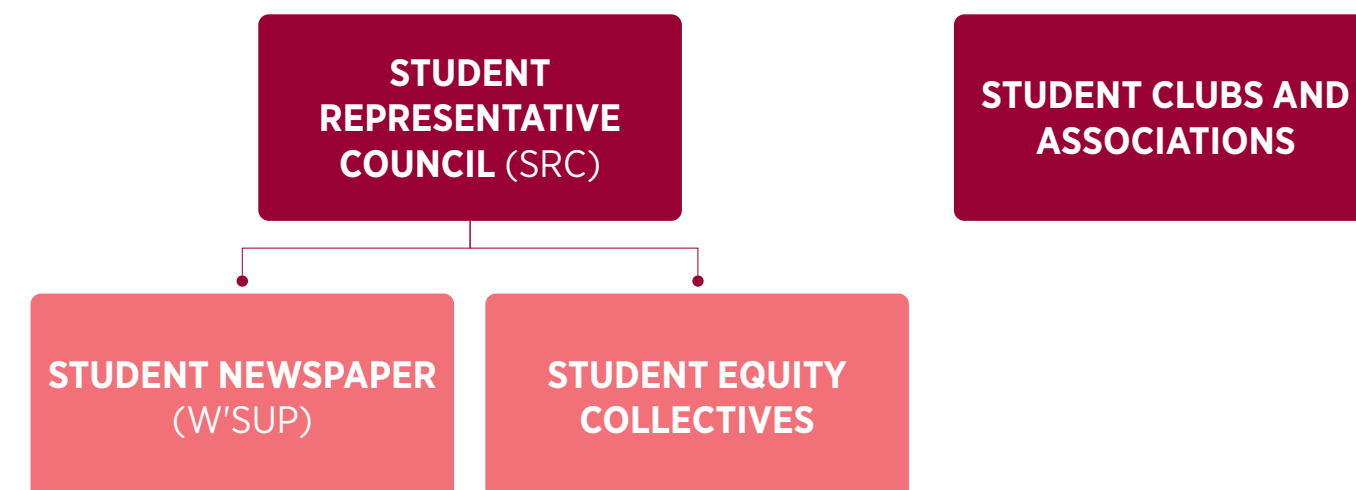
There are several student-led channels for the student voice. Most universities have similar setups with some variation between them. The level of influence varies between these roles, and they can be perceived as having less institutional power than roles in committees and senate, but this is a function of the culture around student engagement and decision making.

The Student Representative Council (SRC) is the peak student representative body, comprised of directly elected student members. It is tasked with hearing from students, making decisions on broad issues and how to approach these with the university, and is allotted a budget out of Student Services and Amenities Fund (SSAF) to conduct its business. The policy and procedures that stipulate the terms of the arrangement also stipulate there shall be a student newspaper and student collectives.

The Student Newspaper (W'SUP) is the student media outlet on campus, it is tasked with providing information about the university and student representation to everyone. The editors of the newspaper and other student led media are directly elected in the same elections as the members of the SRC.

Student Equity Collectives are in the student representation structure and hierarchically they report up into the SRC any systemic equity issues students face. Each collective is led by a member of the SRC who voices the issues affecting their community of students at Western.

Student Clubs and Societies can often play a large role by having impact and influence on the university, most of the time school-based student clubs will have a direct link through their relevant school with highly engaged staff networks. The student clubs and societies have access to voicing concerns through multiple networks, the SRC also formally networks with clubs and societies through the Vice-President Activities' SRC Clubs and Activities sub-committee.

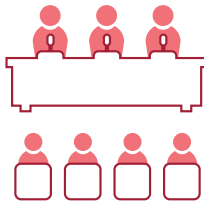


Student Influence on Decision Making in the University



Student Representation (SRC)

Democratically elected student representatives have access to spaces where they can voice concerns of their fellow students during meetings and by also boosting existing and creating new campaigns around various student issues. Student Representatives are also members of various committees within the university.



Academic Committees & Governance

Student representatives are also elected to represent their fellow students in various committees throughout the University. Usually between 1-4 students are responsible for attending their respective committee's meetings, which are held on a regular basis. The responsibility of the student in the meeting is to advise the committee on the student perspective of various items or issues that the committee is responsible for discussing. Often the various committees are responsible for making recommendations as appropriate to the Academic Senate and/or Board of Trustees. Students on committees are involved in the decision making of academic policy, courses, subjects, development of research, and academic plans.



Student News and Media

Student Editors for student news and media are also democratically elected and are responsible for sharing relevant student news to the student population. Student news and media provides students with the opportunity to voice their ideas, concerns and opinions through submissions to the editors responsible for publishing content.



Student Lead Petitions

Petitions are a powerful way for students to take a stand for or against a cause they feel passionately about. Within the University, student-led petitions serve as a mechanism for generating discussion around various issues and mobilizing students to support the cause. Often, elected student representatives are involved with student-led petitions, although this is not always the case. For example, recently, non-student representatives have been the instigators of student petitions advocating for changes to Proctored examination policies and the University's approach to allowing high school aged students on to Parramatta City campus.



Online platforms

Online platforms tend to be viewed as spaces that are student centric, especially those not controlled or endorsed by the university. One such example is the WSU Rants Facebook page, which collects anonymised statements that often are responsive to a university service or amenity. The university monitors this Facebook page from time to time, particularly when urgent or wide-spread issues are reported on and have not been reported through any official channels of the university. You potentially have seen various wsustudentlife instagram polls before too; these often influence the decision making of the Student Events team.



Student Life

General participation in various aspects of student life including activities and events such as community dinners, can often provide an opportunity to discuss issues with peers and colleagues. The inadvertent impact and influence one can have with a one-on-one conversation can spark ideas and actions reminiscent of grassroots organizing.



SSAF bids and Proposals

The university engages in an annual bidding process for a variety of SSAF funded projects and initiatives; students are encouraged to put their ideas into action by submitting a bid. Similarly, involvement in the SRC, clubs and collectives can give students a little more agency and less rigidity in terms of the time constraints by being able to suggest uses of the pockets of funding allocated to these groups; this will be also be expanded on in a later section of this document.



Student Feedback Surveys

Student feedback in the form of surveys is a tool used to collect quantitative information about the student experience ranging from student feedback on units, to teaching, to university management of various initiatives and other surveys conducted via the student feedback community Western You. These quantitative measurements of the student experience are used to inform resourcing and workload allocations, and what other considerations need to be made depending on the nature and circumstances of the context of the feedback and the feedback itself.



Student Clubs and collectives

Student leaders may often be called upon to be included in various working parties or ad hoc processes of items of business university departments are engaging in. Student Leaders within student clubs/societies and equity collectives are requested to give feedback or join these spaces as a means of giving voice to issues and issues within marginalised groups within the student body.



University Staff

University staff can be made up of of student casuals and interns working as support staff within the uni with their rolesspecifically focused on providing assistance and working along side students as well as help raise issues and concerns of students. Alumni/postgraduate positions that form part of the teaching staff are also made up of PHD students who can act as a voice for their peers.



Student parternship programs

Various student partnership opportunities are becoming more prevalent as the literature becomes more widely available and the practice becomes trendier. Currently one fantastic example of student partnership at Western exists in the 21st Century Curriculum project in the PVC Learning Futures area of the university. Students are casually employed in roles and are empowered to make informed decisions that affect the planning and outcomes of the project; it seeks to undertake a renewal of learning and teaching within Western to provide better graduate outcomes for the future of students at Western.

What are the key barriers to students being heard?

	What are the barriers?	Why are they hard to remove?
Vicious cycle – low student engagement leads to less reliance on student input	<p>There is a diminishing culture around the student voice that has reduced its influence within the university, which further lessens the priority of student involvement in decision making.</p> <p>When the impact of student representation wanes, those who are elected and those on the University side make decisions that account for the lack of engagement, this cements low engagement as the norm and feedbacks those expectations back into the relationships between students and the University.</p> <p>There is also a time demand on thorough consultation which conflicts with an institutional culture of moving ahead quite quickly.</p>	<p>Institutional cultures develop slowly overtime and become embedded in all actions and decisions.</p> <p>A circuit-breaker approach is needed to change the way students are involved that can address the feedback loop that reinforces poor engagement from both sides.</p>
The sheer size of the organisation	<p>Western is a large University; this creates many different barriers to the student voice that are common in large bureaucracies with complex decision-making structures. It can be hard for students to know who to talk to to address something.</p>	<p>This is the nature of the beast but there are always actions we can take to streamline certain feedback or create regular check-in intervals that remove barriers to feedback or engagement.</p>
Only so much 24 student reps can cover	<p>SRC is 24 elected representatives, given the number of decisions made in the university this is quite small – there is only so much work a council of this size can cover.</p>	<p>If you have a council that is any larger it usually doesn't run well (60 people in one meeting can be difficult to manage).</p> <p>Decisions around redesigning or evaluating the operation of the SRC are usually left to the SRC itself, this self-evaluation has a natural conflict.</p> <p>Thinking of more innovative ways to get student input is not easy.</p>
Reliance on good will, not process	<p>Lots of decision making is made by staff on the run and is not very consultative of student voice.</p> <p>Student input isn't sought on all decisions, up to staff to determine level of input when not stipulated.</p> <p>If there is an absence of a process around student input, it is down to the good will of staff.</p>	<p>The problem here is the diminishing resources across the whole university, which reduces the time for proper consultation.</p> <p>It's mostly down to individual staff decisions on whether or not students are involved.</p> <p>Ultimately, this is a box tick exercise on some decisions.</p>
No shared student voice	<p>Students aren't always clear on what they want.</p> <p>Getting broad student support for ideas can be very difficult, most students are not engaged.</p>	<p>There is a disconnect between students in general, but the disconnect between elected reps and the wider student body is bigger. This can result in reps who want to do events rather than advocate on issues because they don't know what the pressing issues are – due to disconnect.</p> <p>Lack of results can dissuade students from future actions or ambition.</p>

Unclear how to act

	What are the barriers?	Why are they hard to remove?
	<p>Levers for action aren't always clear for students who do want to make change.</p>	<p>Many students don't know about the SRC</p> <p>University can be selective about what it wants input on.</p> <p>This requires university cooperation on building input mechanisms that are outside of institutional roles.</p> <p>Without a culture of active student impact on decision making, they wouldn't be aware of what options they have – requires institutional knowledge, experience, and commitment.</p>
Uninspired student reps	<p>Having elected reps is good from a democratic point of view but doesn't mean we have the right people in those roles.</p>	<p>Students who are elected often have markedly different expectations to the reality of student representation, this can fuel a significant drop in retention.</p> <p>Students who do not have individual ambitions for civic roles after university, or who have experienced little successful engagement in the past, may be uninspired to put significant effort in to their role. When students don't know what is possible if they put additional effort in, they will not see the point in putting in that additional effort.</p> <p>Elections aren't always the best mechanism for choosing people in leadership roles either – particularly when the culture is not right (low engagement with elections = uncompetitive elections)</p>
Decentralisation of the student experience	<p>The University outsources parts of the student experience including campus management, student residences, WSUonline etc.</p>	<p>This is a business decision – saving money and resources results in student engagement being cut.</p>

Student Representatives' views on representation and engagement at Western

What makes it difficult for student representatives to participate in decision making at Western?

Student representative bodies are sometimes seen as tokenistic or inaccessible to many students. Western Sydney University is spread out over twelve campus locations, with students also studying online and at offshore campuses. This makes it difficult for student representatives to cohesively meet and participate in decision making.

An institution at the scale of Western also has instances of firm structures, processes and hierarchies for decision-making that can seem daunting for some students to understand, break into, and get involved with.

Very few students are involved at the student representative level. For the few who do nominate and join in an elected role, they often face further issues that drag on their retention. Their availability to attend student rep training, lack of adequate resources in training and orientation for the role, caring responsibilities, maintaining social networks and relationships, and sustaining paid employment

all contribute to an already busy schedule for even students studying less than full-time mode.

We asked former and current student leaders and representatives from the SRC, Academic Senate, Academic Committees and Clubs spaces to reflect on their experiences and share some thoughts on several issues concerning student engagement and effectiveness of student representation at Western.

Their responses are captured in the following few pages. All responses, named or deidentified, have been used with permission.

Students Share: What was your expectation of the role vs the reality?

The connect – or disconnect – between students' expectations of the representative role and its reality are summarised in the diagram below.

EXPECTATIONS

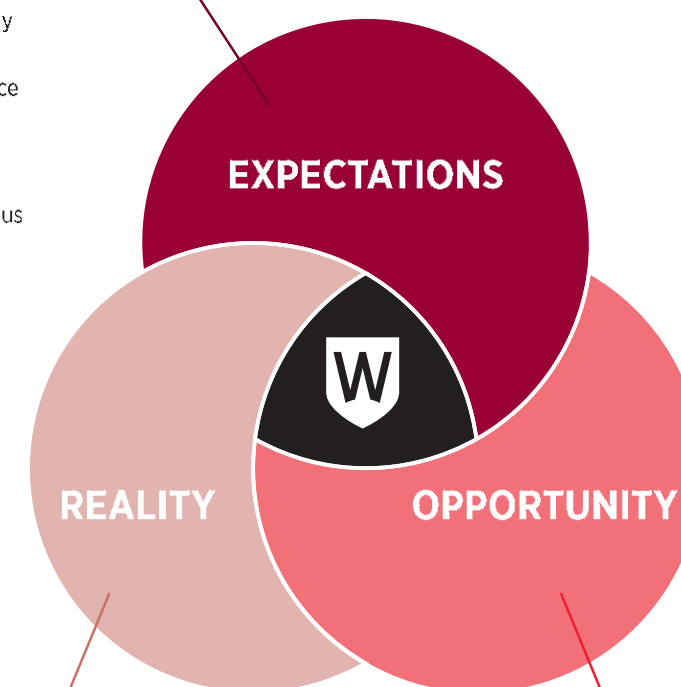
- Lots of social action campaigning
- Planning and hosting social events
- Strong partnerships with University faculties and professional staff
- Strong importance on student voice in Academic Committee/Senate meetings
- High level of engagement and interaction with students on campus and within online/virtual spaces

REALITY

- Difficulty engaging students across various platforms, such as social media, emails and WesternLife
- Difficulty engaging with staff
- Very few on-campus events and campaigns due to the pandemic – lockdown, restrictions
- Difficulty engaging with fellow student representatives, both within own groups and across different groups eg. SRC, Student Editors, Academic Senate, Academic Committees, Board of Trustees, clubs etc.
- Student voice seems tokenistic in University committee meetings

OPPORTUNITY

- Opportunity to network with other students (reps and general), University staff and external stakeholders
- Regular scheduled meetings with the student representative body/committee/group/club
- Express opinions and work collaboratively with team to achieve common goals
- Feelings of pressure and stress from the student rep or leadership role



Students shared some of their specific expectations:

"Coming into my role, I expected this professional environment where we held decently dignified roles, and I would have to step up my game quite significantly. Upon entering, I noticed that there was quite a lot of personal politics and a few reps doing the bulk of the actual work."

"I went into my role expecting to be scrutinized by the students I represent, and whilst this is true to a certain extent, it has been a very rewarding experience to have the support from staff, fellow student reps and peers."

"Committees are 'thankful' for having someone who can provide the 'student perspective'. However one student in a meeting of 20+ lecturers and staff members isn't platform to advocate for student issues, its merely to loop a student in and expect them to tell students about updates in the academic scope etc."

Students Share: What's working well?

Student reps reported that the framework of having equity collectives and campus-based representatives have contributed to **a diverse student voice on the SRC**.

There is also a range of student representation areas through SRC, Academic Senate, academic committees, and campus provosts, which ensure that decision-making processes within different areas and departments of the University involve the **opportunity for student consultation**.

"The amount of representation at WSU is excellent, in that it includes the SRC, Senate, and Committees. The wide variety of equity representation seeks to build a connection with as many students as possible. I wholeheartedly believe that students do want to participate in their university's representation, which is very apparent in the SRC model that WSU has adopted."

Several student representatives have noted in their experience that senior University staff have generally been quite open and receptive to the student voice, despite some student criticism on the overall level of student involvement in executive decision-making.

Former and current student reps have acknowledged that the Student Community (formerly Student Representation & Participation) **support staff play a pivotal role in strengthening student representation and engagement at Western**.

Students Share: What's *not* working well?

"I often felt as a student leader that we were consulted way too late to make any change and it was more or less a notice rather than a conversation."

Some students felt that there is little emphasis placed on the value of the currently elected student representatives as the university tends to **avoid relationship building with them**. This creates a gap in consultation processes.

Many student representatives agree with Simon regarding the complexity of building relationships with the university management and stakeholders. **Student leaders often become disaffected when they**

perceive or experience structures that limit their power in influencing decisions. The uncertainty this creates for student representatives can often perpetuate a diminished sense of responsibility in raising concerns. Understandably, the lowered sense of responsibility impacts representatives' confidence to challenge the status quo.

Some students argue that once given a seat at the table, there is a significant power imbalance, and it is often daunting for an individual to raise the student voice in a room full of department heads. This can evoke feelings of intimidation, nervousness, and fear. **Student representatives often report that sticking out like a sore thumb makes a significant impact on participation**.

A lack of feeling supported and knowledge on how to access information have also been recurring issues raised by the student representatives.

Participation in University governance, committees, SRC and clubs require adherence to **formal policies and procedures often in legal jargon terminology**, which students often find exclusionary and difficult to understand. Some have noted that there is not only a lack of support from the University but also among their fellow students and other elected student representatives.

Some former SRC representatives argue that the **removal of the Student Campus Council model** in the student representative structure in 2019 has caused the campus representatives to lose student support and assistance. While the current structure of a unified student council with one elected representative per campus and equity collective has its advantage in illustrating diverse perspectives over the broader student body, student reps question if it perhaps has contributed to a distancing between individual students, their elected representatives, and the decision-making process at Western.

While the support staff for student representatives are available to support the student representatives in committees beyond the scope of the SRC, the **indirect linking of support and lack of regular touchpoints does not provide the same feeling of support to student representatives who are not formally a part of the SRC structure**.

"Committees are 'thankful' for having someone who can provide the 'student perspective'. However one student in a meeting of 20+ lecturers and staff members isn't platform to advocate for student issues, its merely to loop a student in and expect them to tell students about updates in the academic scope etc."

Simon Preuss-Kearney, the SRC Penrith Campus Representative (2020-21, 2021-22) and Undergraduate Representative of the School of Psychology Student Academic Committee, has shared his thoughts surrounding the difficulties faced by student representatives in the participation of decision-making at the University:

"There is a feeling like we (as student reps) are so far removed from any structure which can influence decision making in the University. There is a clear hierarchy of decision making, and a path which exists that is compulsory for us to pass information up. Since it is a long path to pass up our inputs higher up the hierarchy, then to a degree, getting heard is somewhat at the mercy of each level's discretion or personal interpretation. There is no clear and direct way for student representatives to directly inform the top levels of the University's influential governance and decision making, which many of us would love an opportunity to take even a small part in.

For example, last year many students were concerned about the introduction of ProctorU as a testing method. Most students were not, and none of the Student Representative Council were consulted or directly briefed on this until it was already a set policy. There were many concerned student representatives who wanted to voice their concern, and the only direct path they had was a SRC statement or pestering emails to the higher levels of Western Governance.

Continued >



This of course resulted in little change, and the only concession made was a very limited amount of student Reps (the SRC exec's of the time) were permitted into a meeting to discuss ProctorU (which was effectively just explaining why it would go ahead no matter what). It was not an open invite to all student representatives wanting to voice their concerns of their constituents. This is again an example of an isolating hierarchy, and can easily amount to covert power (A form of power that is hidden and therefore its effects are subtle but still effective. For example, controlling the agenda and thus what is discussed in a meeting is an example of covert power, where this is done in a way that is not openly discussed or acknowledged). While this is a completely common tactic of running things, it can be significantly demoralising for passionate student representatives who want to honestly voice their constituents concerns, and be a part of an honest discussion – even if it just means hearing what needs to happen and passing that onto students (that way at least, students are not left in the dark on issues).

Students Share:
What level of influence should the student voice have?

Student representatives were asked how much influence they expected to have over different types of university decisions. Their responses are summarised in the following table.

	Types/Level of Influence Student Representatives believe they should have within the University				
	Keep us informed	Keep us informed, listen to our concern	Work with us to ensure our concerns are addressed	Work with us to come up with solutions and implement our suggestions to the maximum extent possible	Implement what we decide
Types of decisions or actions within the University	Senior/executive staff appointments	SSAF Transparency	Feedback on tutorials, lectures, educators	Academic policy and procedural reviews – e.g., Misconduct, disadvantages/ difficulties because of Covid-19, online learning, ProctorU	Student proposed social events (with professional assistance and consultation)
	New vendors on campuses	Major Infrastructure and business plans e.g., Caddens Corner	SSAF Bids and Reviews procedures		
	Staffing changes	Staffing changes		SSAF Allocations	
		University financial reviews			
		University Governance			

Students Share:
Big ideas for WSU’s student voice?

Some student representative suggestions for improving the student voice are captured below.

IDEA: Focus on campus and social life

“Our students are not on our campuses long enough to be fully engaged and we created this culture by having 11 campuses”

“Start at the fundamentals of student social life. I think students will care more if they have that sense of community first.”

“More events, regularly engage student volunteers and promote volunteer opportunities, focus on fostering personal relationships with the students we represent!”



IDEA: Mandatory training for candidates who wish to nominate for Student Representative Council Executive positions e.g. President

"A better informed and connected student representative is something I seek to strengthen in my student voice roles. I would love to work towards developing a training model for new student representative and making that a freely accessible and compulsory program to complete to apply for the position of president. This can ensure that all President[s] entering their roll hit the ground running with a complete knowledge of what the role generally entails, and who the main contacts are (instead of treading water for the first 2-4 months). An additional side benefit of this is any student who goes for the position, who fail to get it but do get another position (or are unsuccessful for all applications but will be eligible in the future) are also fully informed in what the SRC requires and gives them a base knowledge head start - which the SRC would exponentially benefit from having."

IDEA: Externalise the SRC – independent student unionism

"Externalise SRC, grow the Student Community team like any other office so there's more support, less stress and more action - and ultimately focus on campaigns that support students and less events that simply give out food and prizes with no purpose."

iDEA: Have regular public forum debates on campuses discussing student issues

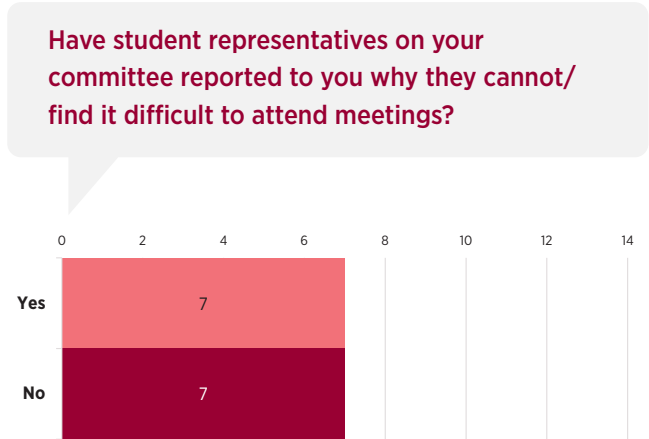
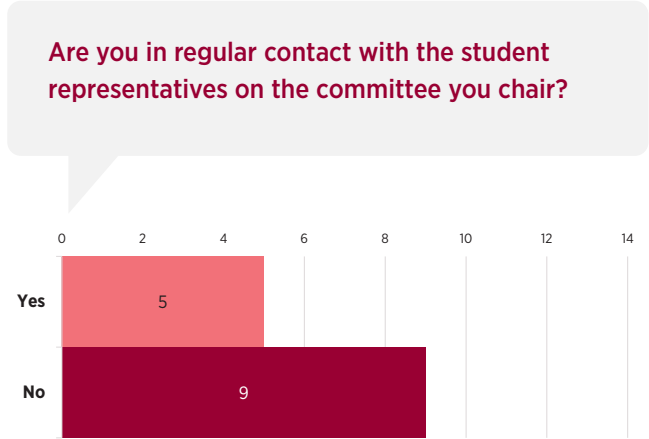
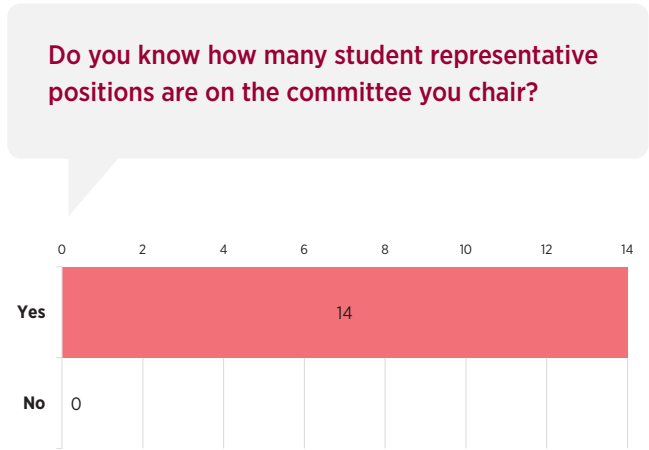
"I believe the implementation of student forums and streamlined meetings may be effective in this, however at present the meetings are closed to the larger student population. A general forum, perhaps several that are specific to different issues, may help students come forward with their concerns. Private forums may also be available for those who wish to remain anonymous. General forums can be a way of reaching as many students as possible and may happen over a day or days. This may happen at the start and/or end of semesters to fully accommodate all concerns that students voice, with periods in-between to try and raise these issues to administration."

Committee Chairs' thoughts on student representation

We asked Committee Chairs for comments on their experiences with student representatives and student representation in general. Some noted the challenge of keeping a student engaged enough to respond to emails, to show up to the meetings and not drop off. Some noted the valuable aspect of having a student representative and that it can be useful to invite the student representative they already interact with for further opportunities for them to give feedback.

Committee chairs have varying approaches to their relationship with the student representatives on the committees they chair, some are quite active and email their students directly and some leave it up to the committee secretary. Most chairs are aware of the pressure students face with managing their own schedules.

The following graphs and tables offer a summary of their responses.



What do you believe makes it difficult for student representatives to participate in decision making at Western?

- Level of influence
- Scheduling
- Preparedness and confidence
- Student input not prioritised
- Awareness of position

What do you think is working well when it comes to student representation and engagement at Western?

- Student Representative Model/ structure (student voice in the room)
- SRC is a good hub/network for all student reps to engage with each other
- School-based clubs

What do you think could be improved when it comes to student representation and engagement at Western?

- Remuneration/incentives
- Committee chair/member skill-building in engaging student representatives
- Better communication with student reps
- Improved student body awareness of the positions
- Students taking the position seriously
- Improvement to the student rep model/framework
- Increased orientation for student reps
- Meetings with the chair before the meetings
- Mentorship



Student representation

Engagement at the official representative level suffers across nomination statistics, election participation, representative attendance, and their retention.

It's difficult to disentangle the reasons why but they all link to the key themes throughout this document: that the system for student representation at WSU doesn't accommodate the circumstances and lifestyles of students and so they either don't participate, aren't interested, struggle to contribute and face challenges staying in touch.

The following section explore how these themes manifest in each of the different areas of official student representation at WSU.

Students and Committees

We've heard from the chairs of committees and some of the student reps on why they think it is difficult for students to commit to responsibilities of student representative positions. Below are graphs that hopefully continue to paint the picture about the levels of retention of student representatives on the committees of the university.

These figures could indicate that interest in the committees is not very high to begin with and students consistently experience clashes with the meetings as they are not scheduled around them.

When it comes to the more engaged cohort, the Postgrads have a much higher attendance rate at their committee meetings. They appear to be more dedicated than undergrad, potentially indicating age and other demographics could contribute to whether they attend or not.

One instance of what may improve the retention rate of a student representative is the directorship training that student representatives on the Board of Trustees receive. Such a rigorous and robust training experience may be a factor in improving the readiness and preparedness of the student members.

Committee members and meetings

School Academic Committees (Combined) - All 14 Schools



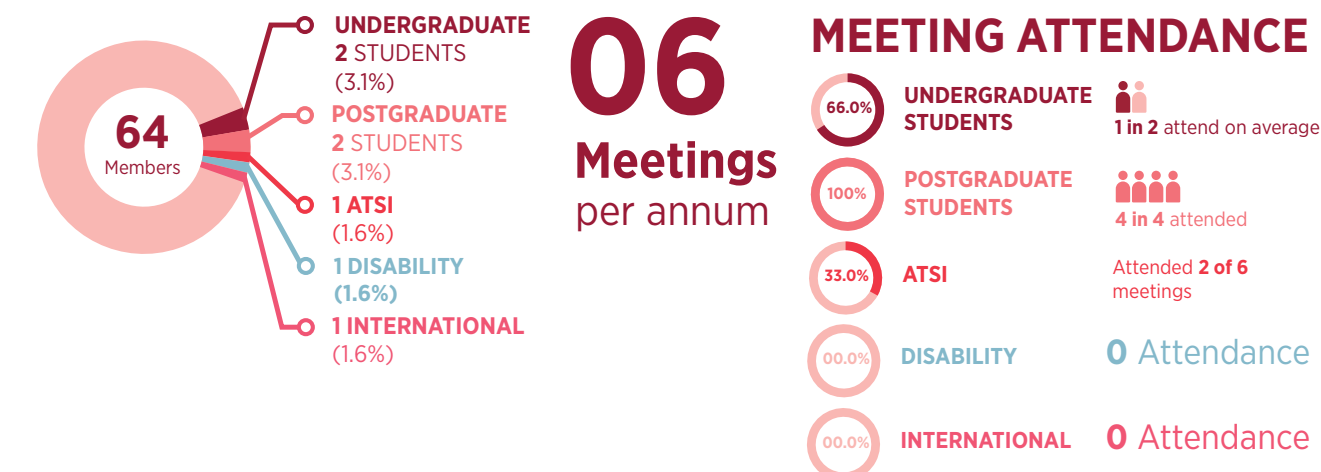
RHDR (Combined) - All Schools



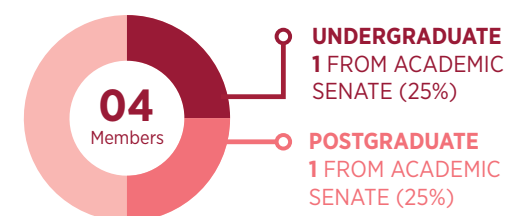
Cluster Boards (Combined) - All Schools



Academic Senate



Academic Appeals & Integrity Committee



Academic Senate Policy Committee



APCAC (Academic Planning and Course Approvals Committee)



Assessment Committee



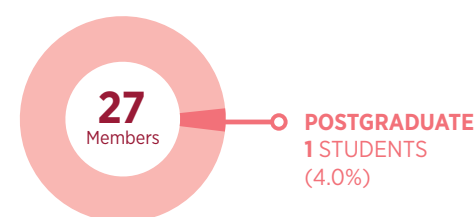
MTALC (multi-disciplinary Teaching and Learning Committees)



Education Committee



Research Committee

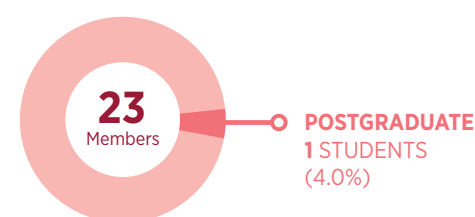


4-6
Meetings
per annum

MEETING ATTENDANCE

00.0% POSTGRADUATE MEMBER 0 Attendance

Research Studies Committee

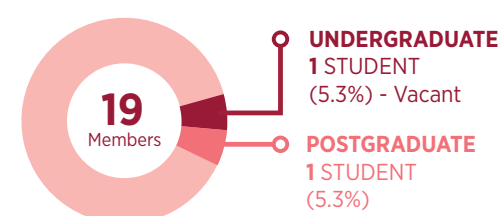


12
Meetings
per annum

MEETING ATTENDANCE

80.0% POSTGRADUATE MEMBER Attended 9 out of 12 meetings

LaTTE (Learning & Teaching technology Advisory Group)



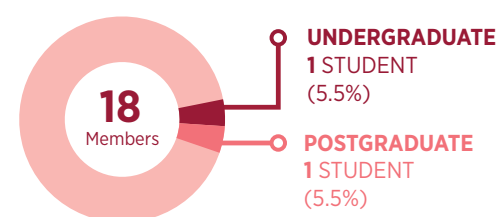
12
Meetings
per annum

MEETING ATTENDANCE

00.0% POSTGRADUATE MEMBER 0 Attendance

UNDERGRADUATE POSITION (VACANT)

Board of Trustees



06
Meetings
per annum

MEETING ATTENDANCE

100% UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT Full Attendance

100% POSTGRADUATE STUDENT Full Attendance

University Central Provost Committee

04 Meetings per annum **17 MEMBERS** No student Representatives

University WHS & Wellbeing Committee

04 Meetings per annum **4+ MEMBERS** No student Representatives

Third Party Provider Committee

06 Meetings per annum **30 MEMBERS** No student Representatives

Business Infrastructure Development Committee

24 Meetings per annum **08 MEMBERS** No student Representatives

Academic Integrity Working Party

07 Meetings per annum **12 MEMBERS** No student Representatives

Data Breakdown

You can see here some issues with attracting and retaining student representatives on these committees. Postgraduate students appear to be more dedicated than undergraduate students. This could be due, in part, to a lack of training for – or intimidation in – high-level decision-making settings.

Statistics: Student Representative elections

The figures below show that there were a similar number of students who needed to be replaced in 2020 and 2021. In both years you can see that the minority of student representatives on the SRC and Student Editor team stay in office for their entire term. Some of the resignations are received before the formal commencement of the term. Usually, student reps have a change of mind, or find that they have not been able to balance work, study, and other commitments, and sometimes students simply move on to other universities or discontinue their studies.

SRC & Editor Retention 2020 – 2021

15	Resignations
5	Vacated due to absence
3	Ceased to be eligible
12	Positions filled 100% term

SRC & Editor Retention 2019 – 2020

18	Resignations
4	Ceased to be eligible
3	Vacated due to absence
3	Resigned for succession
9	Positions filled 100% term

NOMINATIONS

The nominees and their nominations paint a picture of which roles are highly sought after and which roles are unlikely to be filled. The most recent round of elections in fact saw one position, the Queer Representative, go unfilled despite two people nominating for it. One nominee turned out to be ineligible and one nominee, who was running for a few other positions, turned out to be successfully voted in for another position due to their preferences, rendering the Queer Representative position vacant.

The campus representative positions were not highly sought after in this round of elections. But the equity representative positions also were virtually on par in terms of the average nominees across the spread of positions, in fact the First Nations Representative as

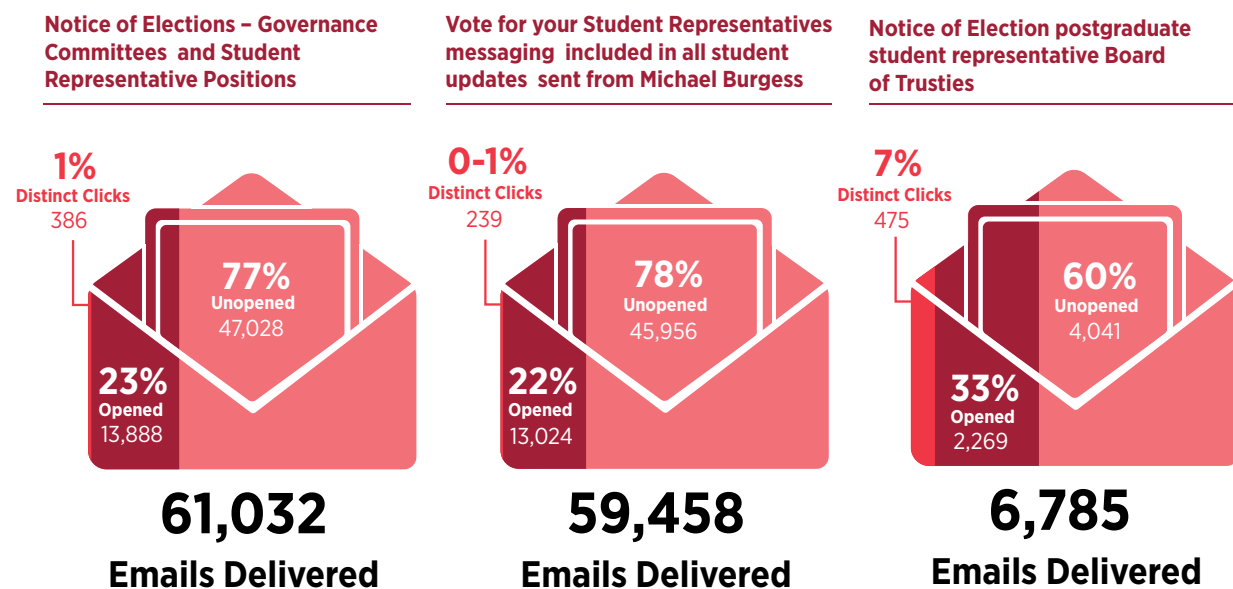
well as the Residential Representative positions did not receive any nominations and were subsequently filled via an expression of interest process following the elections.

More data could be collected to inform us why these positions are not receiving any nominations.

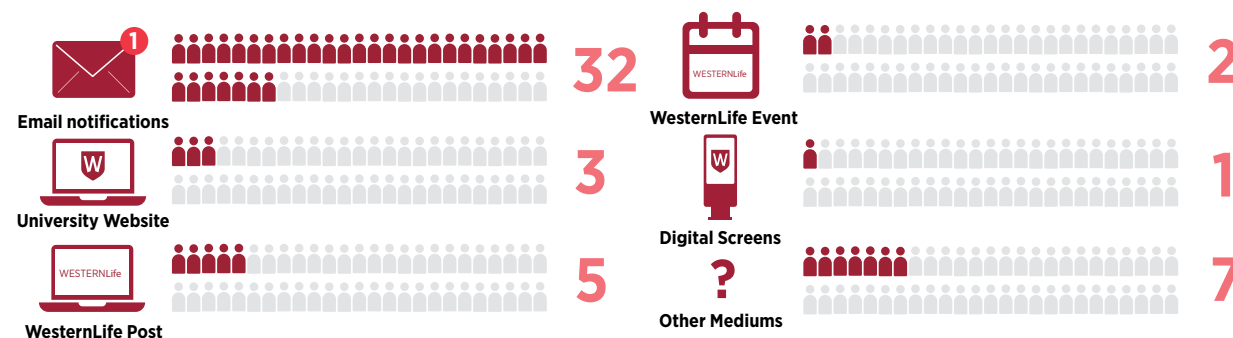
The 37 successful nominees in the SRC and editor elections in 2021 were made up of a group spanning across multiple campuses, albeit unevenly, and also off par with the distribution of student enrolments per campus. For example, with 17 students at Parramatta South, they comprised of almost half the total students who nominated for a position.

More data could be collected to inform us why these positions are not receiving any nominations.

Nomination Statistics

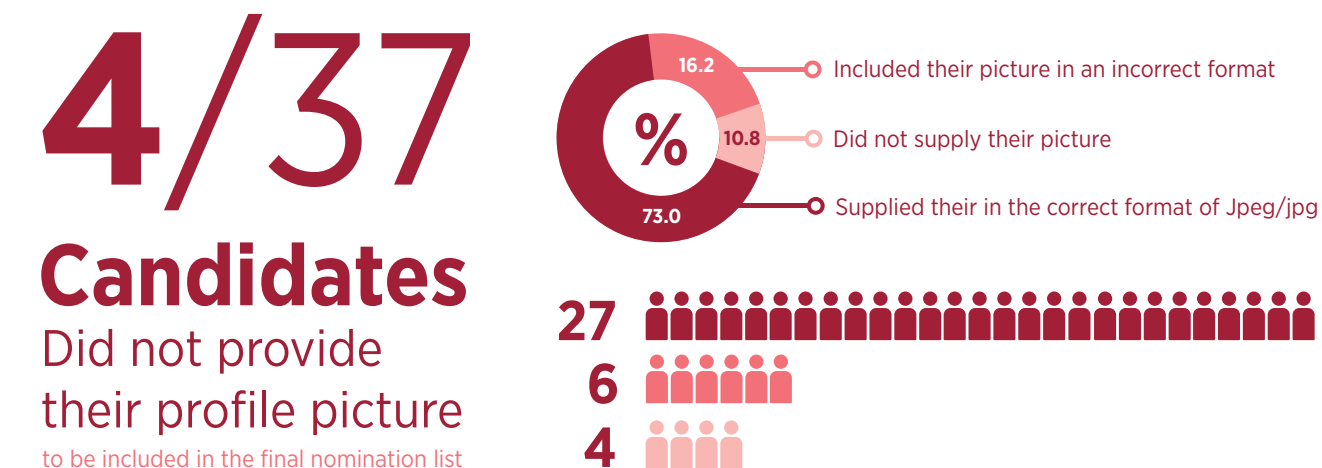


Number of Student Nominations

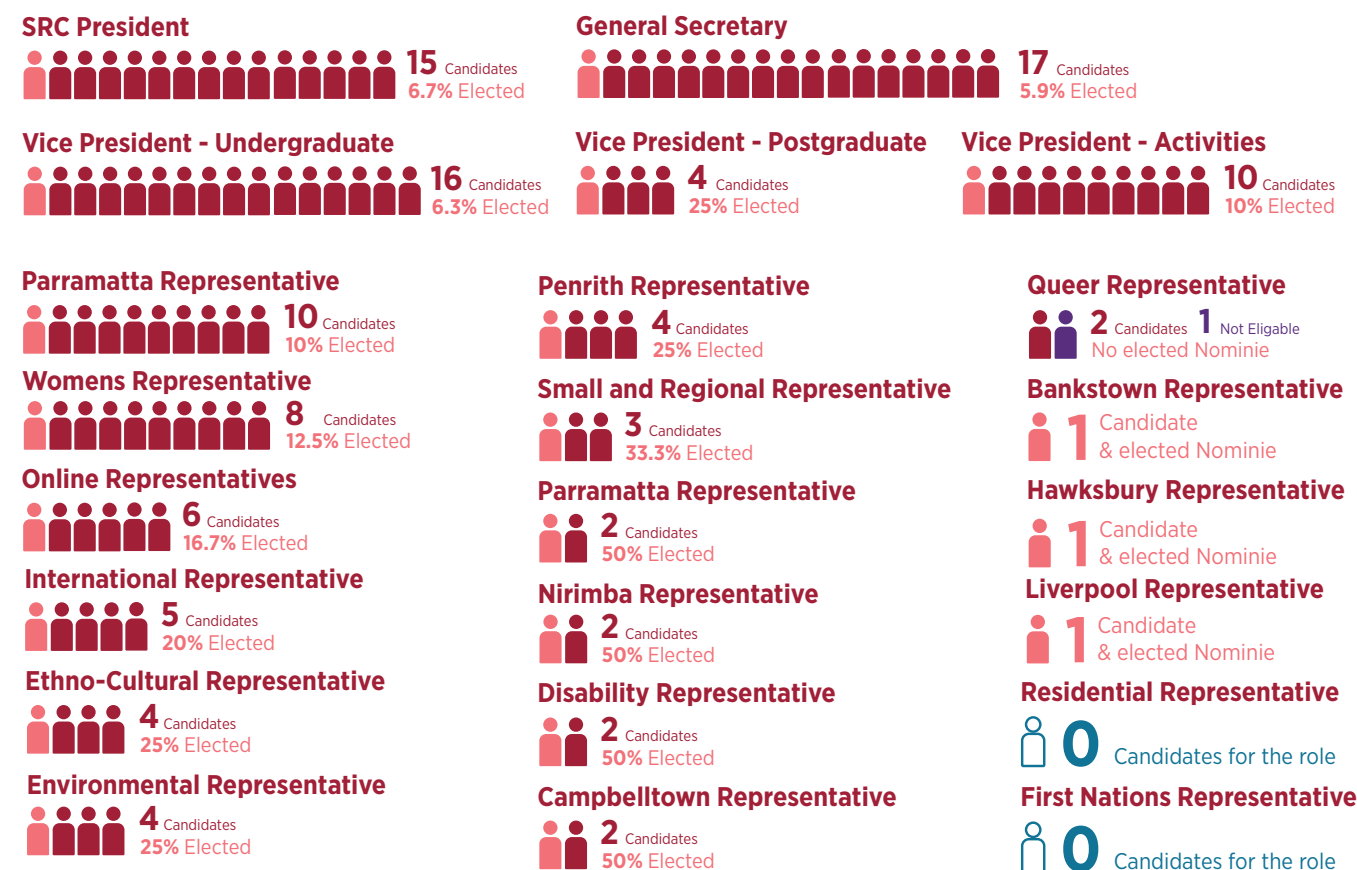


Candidate Applications

Candidate Profile pictures

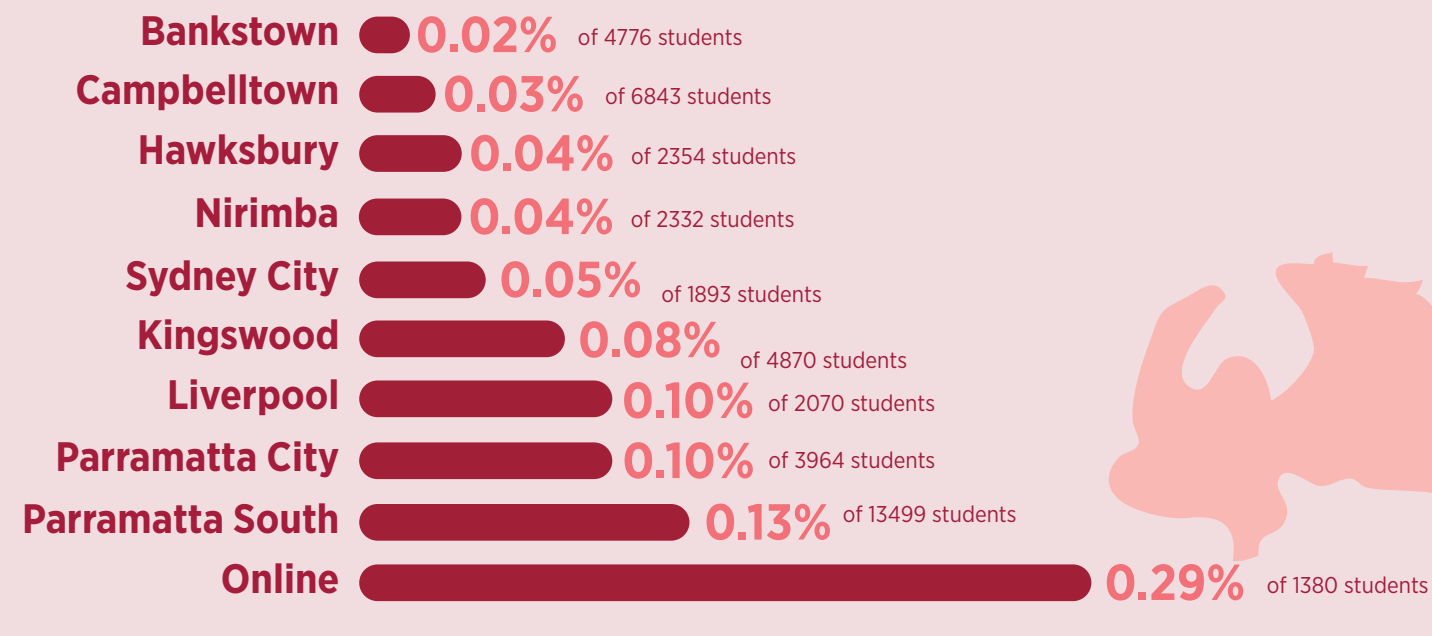


Total Candidate applications for each SRC Role



Number of students nominated from each campus

Percentage of nominees out of enrolled students at each campus



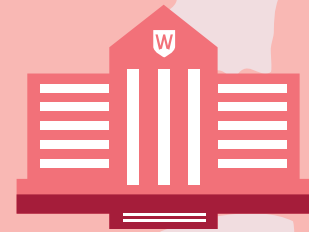
Hawkesbury
1 Student
2.7%



WSU Online
4 Students
10.8%



Nirimba
1 Student
2.7%



Kingswood
4 Students
10.8%

Parramatta City
4 Students
10.8%



Parramatta South
17 Students
46%

Liverpool
2 Students
5.4%



Bankstown
1 Student
2.7%



Sydney City
1 Student
2.7%



Campbelltown
2 Students
5.4%































The 37 successful nominees in the SRC and editor elections in 2021 were made up of a group spanning across multiple campuses, albeit unevenly, and also off par with the distribution of student enrolments per campus. For example, with 17 students at Parramatta South, they comprised of almost half the total students who nominated for a position.

Nominees Discipline and Courses

The most students who nominated for a position in the 2021 SRC and Editor student elections were enrolled in a Business school program; every 1 in 665 students in the School of Business nominated themselves. The Schools of Medicine, Education, Science and Graduate Research were not represented by any nominees.

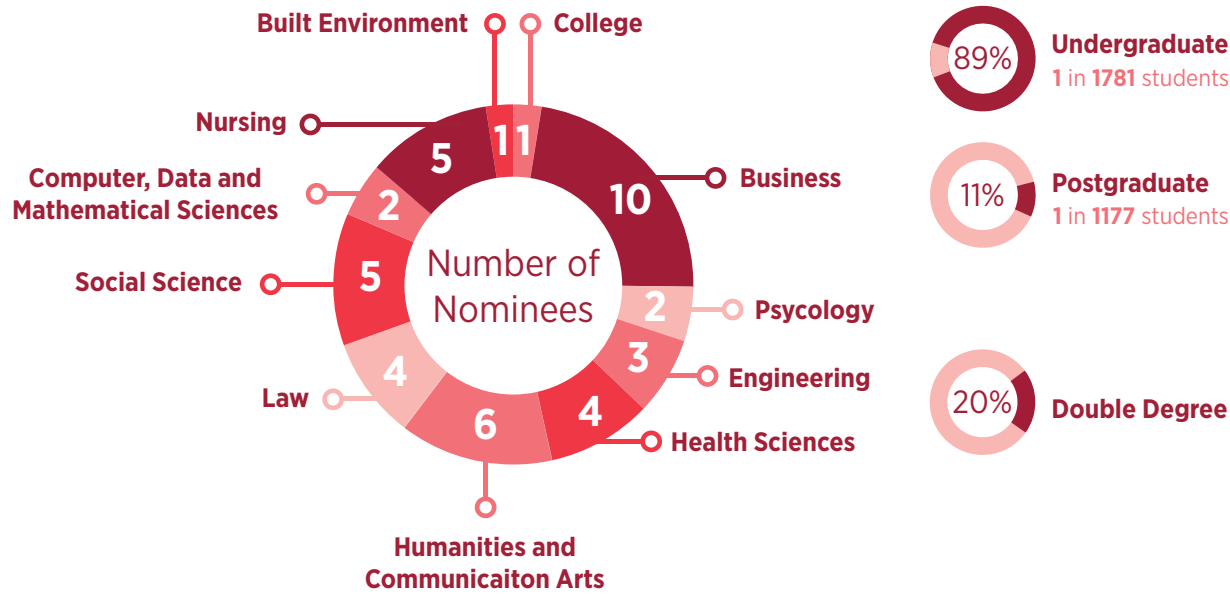
Nominees Discipline and Courses

























Number of nominees at each school























 Business	 1 in 665 students	10 nominees 27.03%
 Humanities and Communication Arts	 1 in 854 students	6 nominees 16.22%
 Nursing	 1 in 1264 students	5 nominees 13.51%
 Social Science	 1 in 1095 students	5 nominees 13.51%
 Law	 1 in 421 students	4 nominees 10.81%
 Health Sciences	 1 in 961 students	4 nominees 10.81%
 Engineering	 1 in 885 students	3 nominees 8.11%
 Psychology	 1 in 849 students	2 nominees 5.41%
 Computer, Data and Mathematical Sciences	 1 in 1057 students	2 nominees 5.41%
 Built environment	 1 in 2638 students	1 nominee 2.7%
 College	 1 in 4876 students	1 nominee 2.7%
 Medicine		0 nominees 0%
 Education		0 nominees 0%
 Graduate Research School		0 nominees 0%
 Research		0 nominees 0%
 Science		0 nominees 0%
 Other		0 nominees 0%

Nominees Discipline and Courses

Nominess Diciplines and Course



 B Nursing	
 B Law and B Business	
 B Policing	
 B Psychology	
 B Business	
 B Communication in Journalism and PR	
 B ICT and B Business Accounting	
 B Medical Science in Medicinal Chemistry	
 B Podiatric Medicine	
 B Arts	
 B Communications and International Studies	
 B Arts Pathways to Teaching	

 B Arts and B Creative Industries	
 B Business Accounting	
 B Medical Science	
 B Planning	
 B Engineering Science	
 B Information Systems	
 M Building Surveying	
 M Electrical Engineering	
 M International Criminology	
 M Marketing	
 Social Science	

Percentage of Votes Received from each electorate

Below is a graph that demonstrates how many students who could vote for each position did submit a vote.

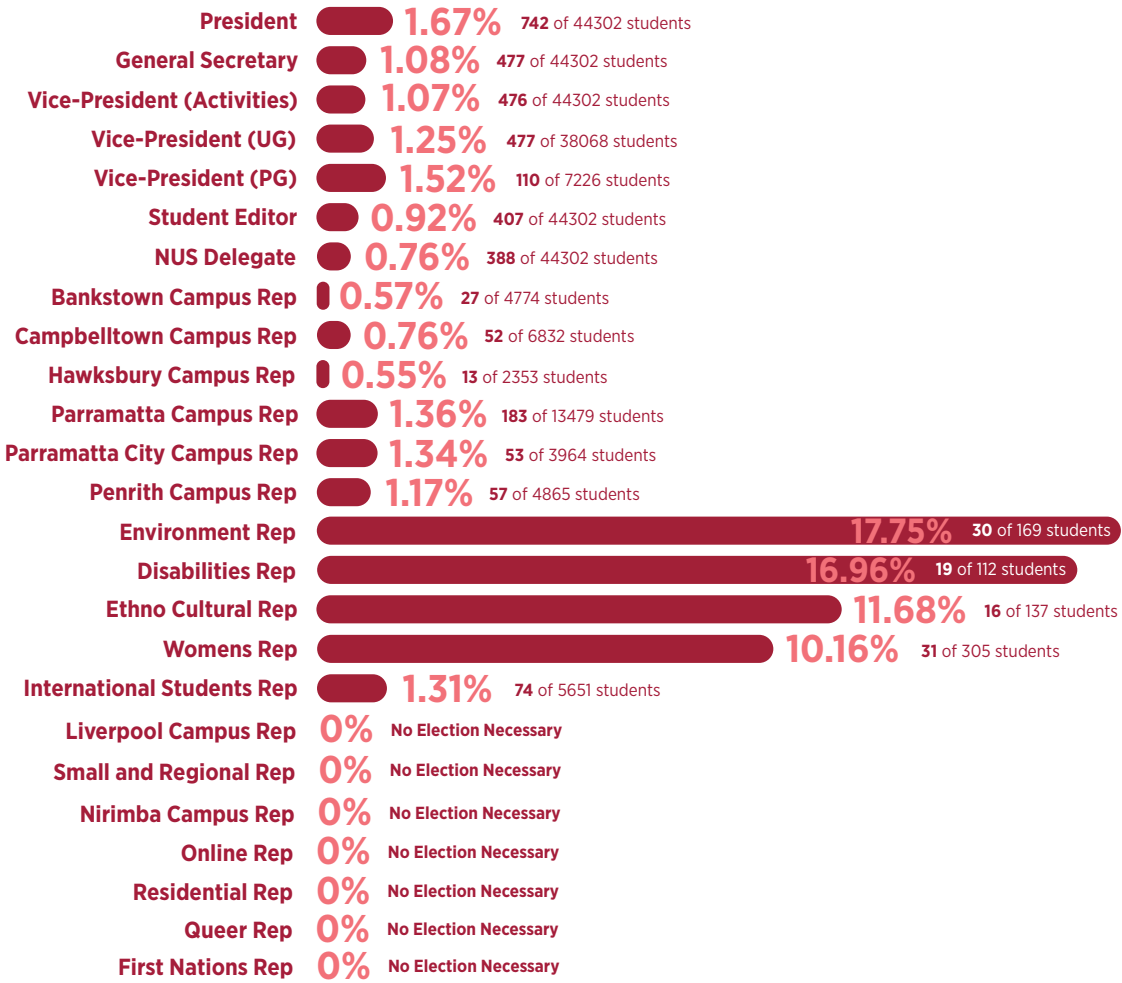
Out of the cohort of 44302 students, only 742 of them voted for a candidate running for SRC President, which made up 1.67% of that cohort. The percentage of votes

in the cohort jumps significantly for equity positions, who are only able to be voted by those identifying students who are members of the relevant collective.

Overall, out of all potential votes that could be submitted, almost only 1% of those were received by the close of the voting period.

Election Statistics 2021

Percentage of votes recieved from each electorate



3582 Total votes cast out of 309,445 potential votes

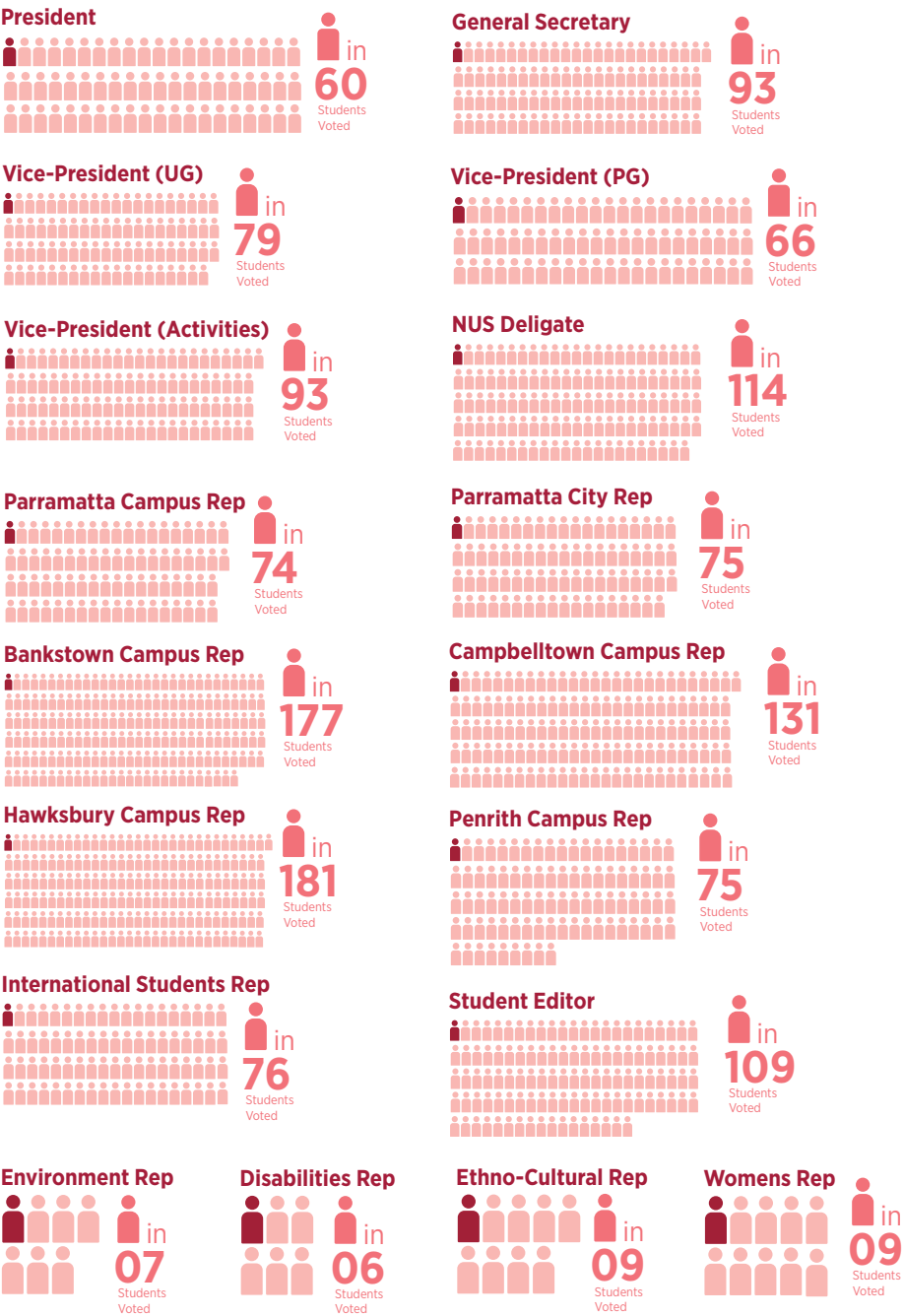


Number of Votes per capita

Displayed slightly differently, the below graphs demonstrate the ratio of how many students voted to how many possible students could have submitted a vote. For example, The Hawkesbury Campus Rep position collected

a vote from every 1 in every 181 eligible voting students from their campus, compared with a much higher 1 in every 76 eligible voting students for the International Rep position.

Number of Votes per capita



Election Statistics (2020 and 2021 comparison)

The voting statistics for the student elections over a two-year period demonstrate that there is quite a low rate of engagement, particularly considering the percentage hovers around less than 2% of total possible votes. When comparing the 2021 and 2020 elections, it is evident that some positions that are not attracting nominees, or only one nominee, resulting in no election/voting. It draws to attention that many students are not taking part in the opportunity to have their say in how and who should represent them and their issues.

It is possible that many students don't believe that there should be a "politicised body" that represents their views, it is also possible there are students who are keen to engage but either are not engaged enough to find out the information just in time or find they do not have the capacity to be involved; all of which may prevent students from nominating in the first place but also voting when the ballots are open.

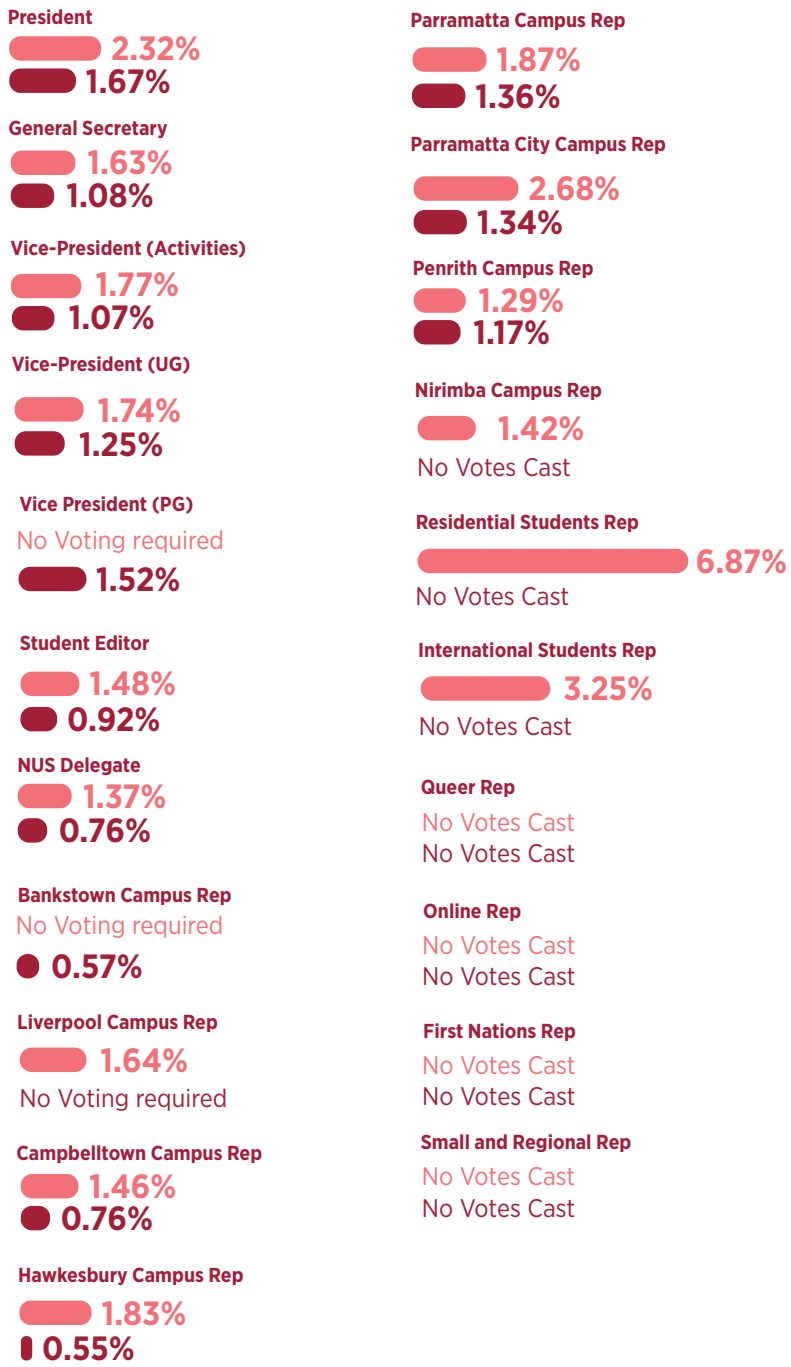
Election Statistics

2020-2021 and 2021-2022 voting statistics comparison

ELECTION

2020-2021

2021-2022



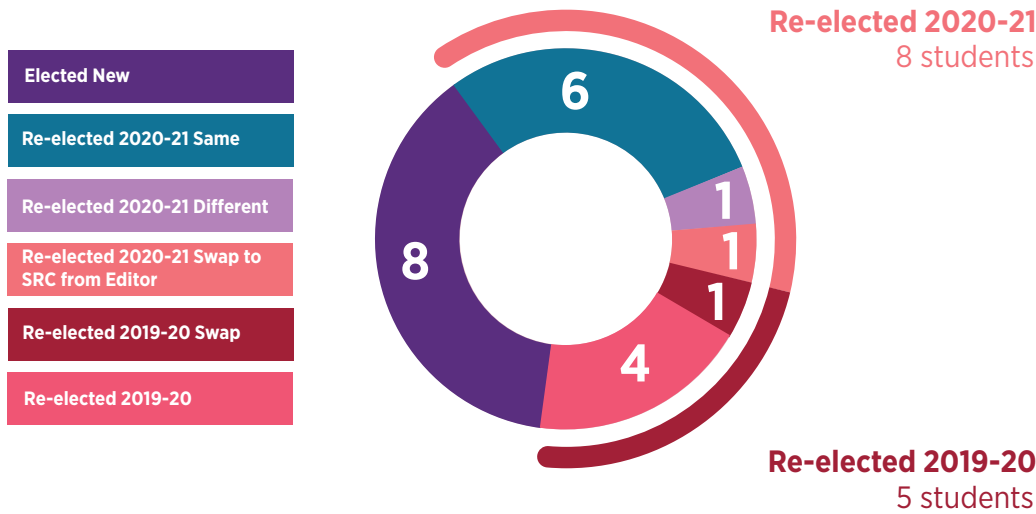
Re-elected vs. New candidates

The contrast between how many candidates have run for a position before and how many are new to being a student representative is also significant. In the most recent SRC and Editor elections in 2021, only 9 total of the successfully elected students had not been a student rep or editor before they

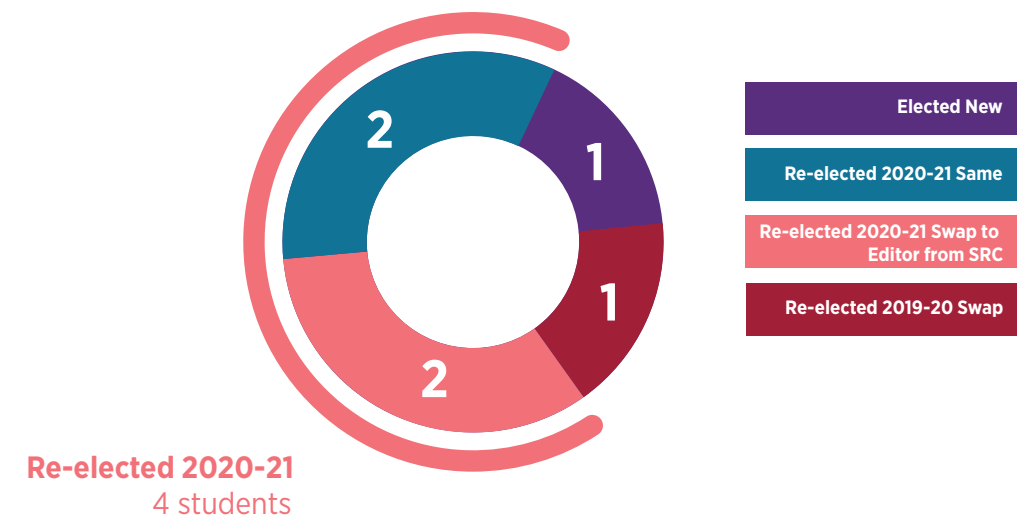
nominated themselves. Eight total students were successfully elected to the same position they held in the previous year, and ten students had returned to the SRC but in a different position or were previously involved as either SRC or Editor and were elected to the opposite group, either from the year previous or the year before that.

Re-Elected V New Candidates

Elected SRC Positions



Elected Editor Positions



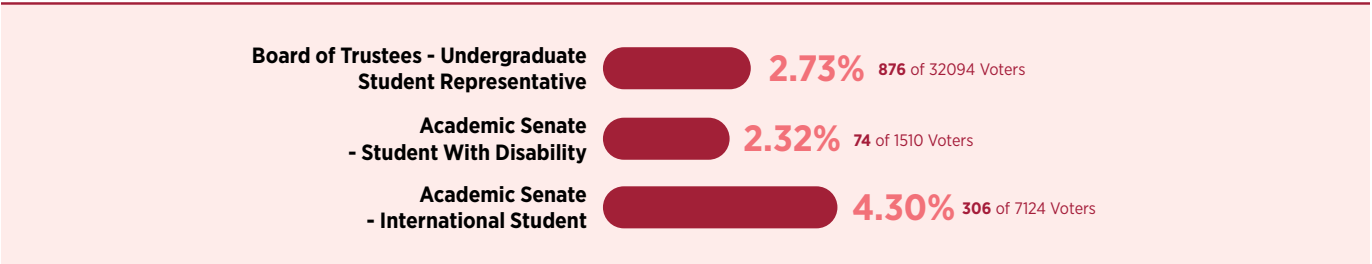
Election Statistics Academic Senate

Data Analysis

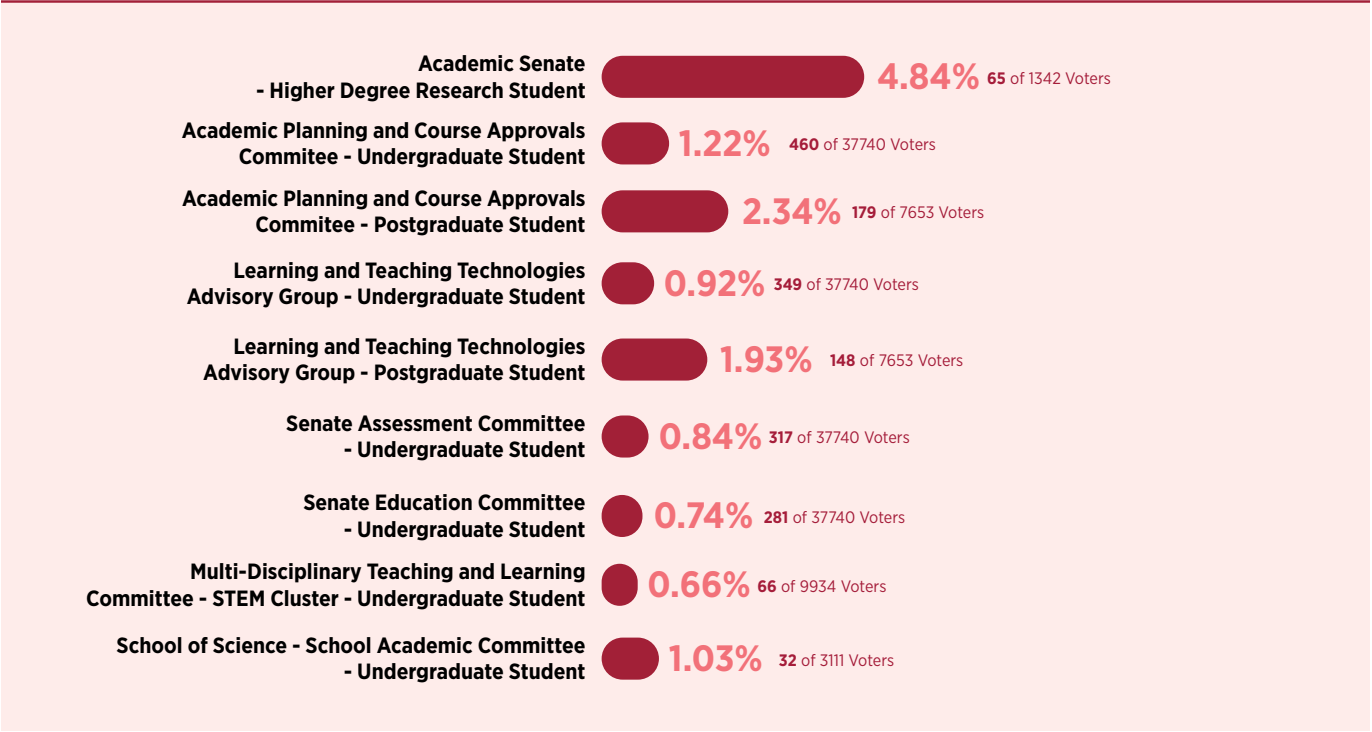
The below percentages are the percent of total votes per eligible voters in the cohort for each student committee representative position that was required to have an election. The numbers vary greatly, and possibly indicate that students are much more likely to vote for positions right at the top of the decision-

making hierarchy, for example Academic Senate and Board of Trustees, as opposed to the sub-committees of the Academic Senate and school committees, as well as most of the SRC and Student Editor positions. This could indicate that at a granular level, say for example, for specific committees for assessment policy review and even as high as a school and campus level, students are not overwhelmingly interested in voting. However, with positions perhaps with more power seem to attract more attention.

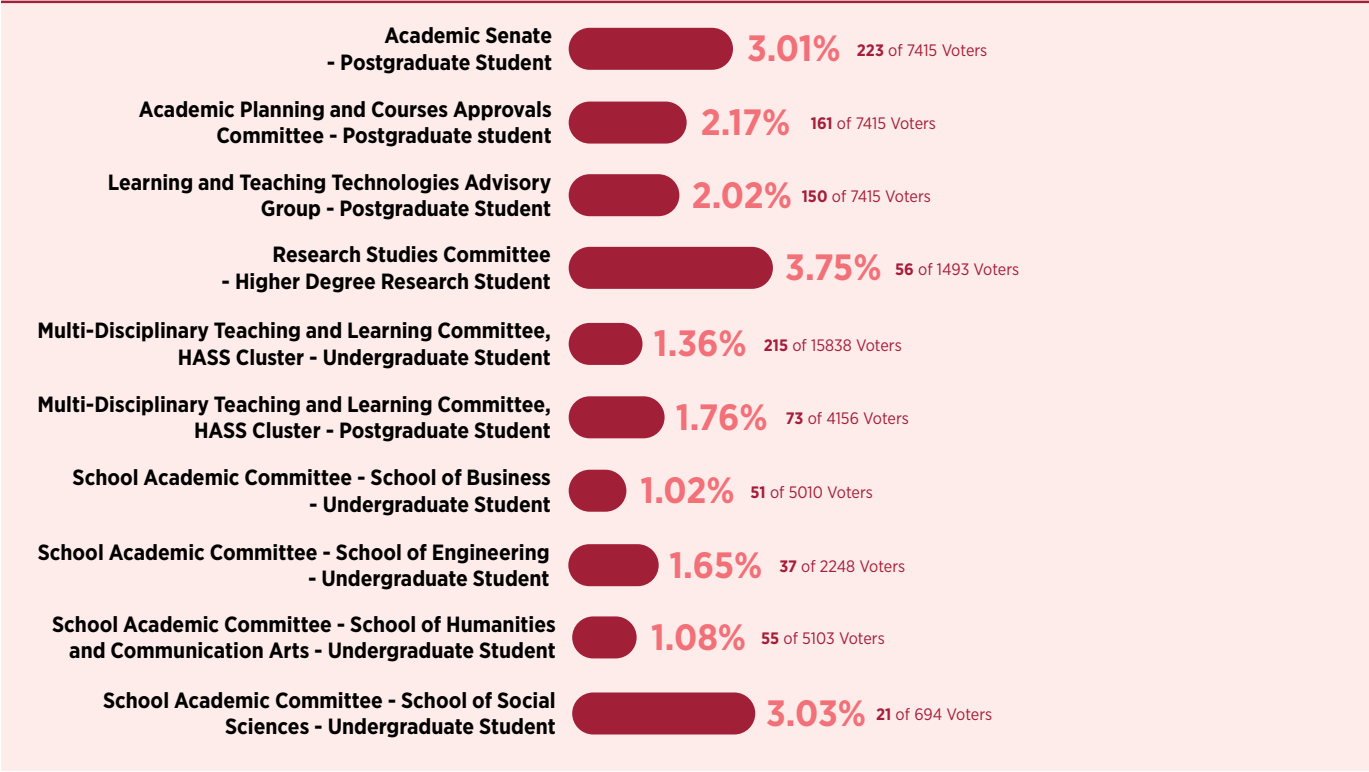
NOVEMBER 2019



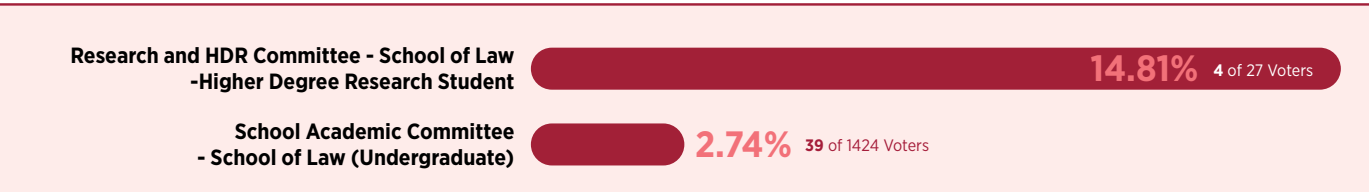
APRIL 2020



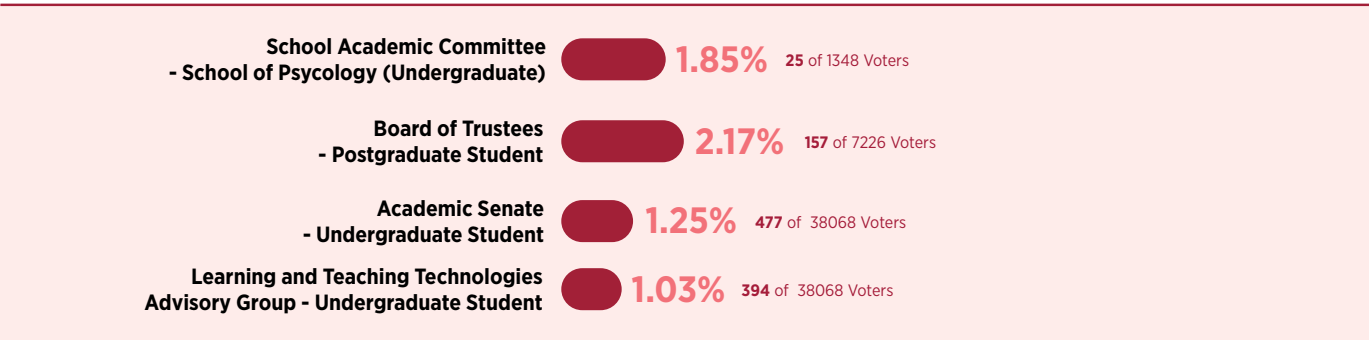
JUNE 2020



SEPTEMBER 2020



APRIL 2021



JUNE 2021



Student Services and Amenities Fees (SSAF)

The Student Services and Amenities Fees (SSAF) are collected from students in accordance with the Higher Education Support Act 2003, which is Australian Federal legislation.

2022 SSAF Amounts

The Government has determined that the maximum rate universities can charge for Student Services and Amenities Fee for 2022 is \$315

The University has decided not to increase the SSAF rate in 2022 and the rate will remain at the same rate as 2020 and 2021.

The maximum fee is \$308.00 per year for full-time students. Lower fees apply for students doing less than a full-time load in the half-year period.

The Act stipulates that the following items shall be the only goods/services the higher education provider can spend SSAF revenue on.

	a. providing food or drink to students on a campus of the higher education provider;
	b. supporting a sporting or other recreational activity by students;
	c. supporting the administration of a club most of whose members are students;
	d. caring for children of students;
	e. providing legal services to students;
	f. promoting the health or welfare of students;
	g. helping students secure accommodation;
	h. helping students obtain employment or advice on careers;
	i. helping students with their financial affairs;
	j. helping students obtain insurance against personal accidents;
	k. supporting debating by students;
	l. providing libraries and reading rooms (other than those provided for academic purposes) for students;
	m. supporting an artistic activity by students;
	n. supporting the production and dissemination to students of media whose content is provided by students;
	o. helping students develop skills for study, by means other than undertaking *courses of study in which they are enrolled;
	p. advising on matters arising under the higher education provider's rules (however described);
	q. advocating students' interests in matters arising under the higher education provider's rules (however described);
	r. giving students information to help them in their orientation;
	s. helping meet the specific needs of *overseas students relating to their welfare, accommodation and employment.

What works well:

- SSAF working group is made up of predominantly students
- We ask students to put in bids for SSAF funds each year

What isn't working:

- The legislation isn't specific on consultation requirements for spending
- Spending on student representation support and direct funding (when compared to other Sydney universities)
- Many of the services included above are not operated by students

SSAF CONSULTATION

The Student Services, Amenities, Representation and Advocacy Guidelines outline the processes of engaging in consultation regarding SSAF with elected student representatives.

Currently, the SSAF Governance Framework at Western Sydney University is to include at minimum a minimum of five (5) nominated Student Representative Council (SRC) members on the SSAF Advisory Group.

The SSAF Advisory Group will review, at minimum, mid-year reports of SSAF funded programs, and prioritise following year SSAF funded programs and initiatives by reviewing end of year reports/proposals and proposals for funding pilot initiatives.

Quorum of the SSAF Advisory Group meetings will be at least three (3) SRC members present at the meeting. The SSAF Advisory Group recommendations and advice are then passed on to the Executive Committee of the University for their approval to proceed.

As required by legislation, the University must publish SSAF revenue expenditure and is available on the university website. For example, some major programs that are SSAF funded, which have had a variety of student input include:

- LEAD Professional Development Program

- Student Clubs activities
- Free Breakfasts
- Childcare subsidies

The SSAF Advisory Group reviews the annual amounts to these and other programs, which generally sets the amount each program receives to function in the following year. To find out more information about historic SSAF funded programs, projects, and initiatives, follow the URL to the [relevant webpage](#).

SSAF PROPOSAL PROCESS AND FEEDBACK

As mentioned above, Western carries out an annual process for seed funding SSAF funded projects and initiatives, which usually takes place towards the end of the calendar year.

The successfully selected proposals are then carried out in the following year. The process of judging both Staff and Student proposals is conducted within the yearly prioritisation by the elected student representatives on the SSAF Advisory Group and provided with recommendations to the Executive Committee for final approval.

It is not uncommon for students to give feedback throughout the year, and students are usually advised to give thought to feedback via a variety of channels.

- Contacting the University via ssaf@westernsydney.edu.au
- Preparing a proposal and submitting when bids open
- Submitting a proposal to the Student Representative Council (SRC)

STUDENT GROUPS BUDGETS

Proposing an initiative to the SRC can potentially advance an idea into an delivered activity or the like, as the SRC is allocated a nominal budget every year for advocacy and student engagement. Usually, the SRC will set its strategy at the beginning of every year on what funding priorities they will focus on, but often decisions are made throughout the year, often reactive to novel circumstances.

The Student Editors of the W'SUP, student news and media, also receive a budget to fund their activities in student storytelling and publishing relevant student news. Like the SRC they set their strategy of what they will fund, including but not limited to print publications, website costs and incentives for students to get works published.

Getting involved with clubs gives students some authority over deciding how to use the clubs' allocated \$3000. Each club receives the funding every year, provided it maintains the requirements.

Is SSAF the only resource available to support initiatives?

In short, no!

Each campus has a senior, usually academic, staff member who provides relevant authority to the campus and often is a spokesperson for the campus, they are known as the Provost of their relevant campus. Each Provost is the chair of their campus Provost Committee, which is comprised of staff members from most schools and departments of the university and normally four (4) student members. The Provost Committee meets approx. 6 times a year to inform each other of major campus discussion, but to also define a campus engagement strategy by using a nominal budget allocated to the committee. Often this amount is between \$10000 and \$20000.

The University from time to time has capacity to seed initiatives if it has space in the operational budget. Alternatively, the University may find itself persuaded or compelled to fund initiatives at a major request or identified critical need, particularly when it comes into the realm of student welfare and support. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was identified early on that due to income loss, some students would find it extremely difficult to maintain their studies and so student grocery and financial support initiative ideas were rapidly evaluated and delivered on.



What have we tried?

Despite many occasions to bring together student representatives from all corners, via zoom gatherings, networking online and emails, it is difficult to get student representatives to show up to something that aims to either provide a network for peer-to-peer mentoring and engagement and skill development or provide either of these.

While the university understands that having these meta-conversations is important, particularly to draw out any issues not just within the student population, but in the experience of a student rep, it can be often difficult to get the ball rolling with only a handful of voices. For example, in 2019 the Student Community team held a workshop via zoom inviting all student reps at the time to discuss how they could better network either other and generate some ideas around what kind of platforming would be the most useful to them to stay in touch online. This workshop was attended by less than ten students out of approximately fifty students who could have attended.

As a result of the abovementioned workshop some key actions were drawn:

- Generate an online group where student representatives can network with each other
- Further encourage student representatives to reach out to one another
- Provide student representatives across the university with orientation and training
- Student representatives are incentivised unequally
- Some of the actions that are in train or have been actioned are the following:
- All student representatives added to a bespoke Western Life group, which brings together SRC, Editors, Club leaders, Collective leaders, and Student Committee Representatives
- SRC encouraged to take the lead in regularly holding catch up zooms inviting all student representatives, two were held in 2021
- Student Representatives across the board were invited to training opportunities for the SRC, further scoping of costs required in 2022
- Professor Alphaia Possamai-Inesedy offering an orientation for Academic Senate student representatives
- SSAF bid to increase remuneration budget to cover a nominal stipend for all student representatives in formal committee positions in 2022

What resources are available?

The Student Community team are dedicated predominately to supporting the work of the SRC, the Student Newspaper, Equity Collectives and Student Clubs, not specifically the Student Committee Representatives but an implied link is there unofficially, however it is not resourced with a particular staff member. There is 1x Student Representative Officer, 1x Publications and Student Representative Officer (part-time), 1x Inclusive Communities Coordinator (part-time supports the collectives), and 2x Student Community Officers (clubs). It is the responsibility of these members of staff to support these student leaders in a variety of ways, while at the same time balancing project work.





Beyond Western

Student Voice Australia

Student Voice Australia is a national initiative caretaken by folks dedicated to good governance in higher education, increasing awareness of authentic student engagement culture and often championing gatherings and resources for the discipline of student representation. Student Voice Australia's resources already include model student representative induction packs; they share broad but useful knowledge and can be accessed via the web anytime.

You can read Student Voice Australia's 'Good Practice Guidelines' [here](#).

Democratic innovations and representation

There are many different innovations in democracy emerging. Many of these focus on different ways members of a community can be represented in decision-making. Some of these explore different methods for voting, like app-based electronic voting, [machine learning](#) and [quadratic voting](#).

Voting to elect representatives is not the only way in which representatives can be chosen. There are different types of representation that range from someone chosen by me to represent my views, to someone chosen by me whom I trust to make a smart decision, to someone who is like me whom I trust to make a smart decision – and all manner of combinations of these.

Which type of representation is used depends on the way in which it confers legitimacy to the task of making decisions. If people trust the people in charge, then they will trust their decisions. For people to trust them, they must trust the process through which they are chosen.

One way of choosing representatives is through democratic lottery, like how you've been chosen to be a part of this process. These selection methods rely on the descriptive qualities of the people who are chosen and the combination of them to confer its legitimacy – they are legitimate because everyone can see someone like them in the room and they all had a fair chance of being chosen.

How this shapes the representation you opt for depends on a few things. Here are some questions that might help:

- Whom do you trust to make decisions on your behalf?
- What makes them trustworthy?
- What is a fair way of choosing representatives?
- Does your answer change depending on the decision being made?

Best Practice examples of engagement

Typically, when engagement professionals talk about good or best practice engagement, they consider two key questions:

- **How genuinely and deeply were the stakeholders engaged?** That is, was information transparently communicated and did people have an appropriate level of influence over the decision-to-be-made?
- **Was the engagement accessible and user-centric?** Were the methods and timing of engagement convenient for the stakeholders and provide the opportunity for the full, diverse range of people to satisfactorily express their views?



The IAP2 spectrum (below) is one common visualisation of the various levels of engagement or influence over a decision.

Student Voice Australia has compiled a list of case studies that represent good engagement practice in the university sector. You can view the list [here](#).

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of their preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Further Reading

Academic Senate Standing committees:
https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/about_uws/leadership/academic_senate/academic_senate_standing_committees

Board Committees and Councils:
https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/about_uws/leadership/board_of_trustees/board_standing_committees_and_advisory_councils

Governance Structure:
https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1231365/20220125_Western_Sydney_University_Governance_Structure.pdf

Secretariat:
https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/about_uws/leadership/governance/secretariat

SSAF Information:
<https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-loan-program/approved-hep-information/student-services-and-amenities-fee>

Student Representation and Participation Policy:
<https://policies.westernsydney.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00290>

Western Sydney University's Board of Trustees:
https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/about_uws/leadership/board_of_trustees

Western Sydney University's Academic Senate:
https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/about_uws/leadership/academic_senate

Western Sydney University Leadership and Governance Overview:
https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/about_uws/leadership

Western Sydney University Organisational Structure:
https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1871507/OVCH0562_org-chart_1A.pdf

Glossary

1. Chair (meeting)

The person who leads the meeting. Used as a verb, the Chancellor chairs the Board of Trustees meetings effectively by keeping to the business outlined in the meeting agenda.

2. Citizens' assemblies

Also known as a citizen's jury or citizen's panel, a citizens' assembly is a process of decision making. These processes give ideal amounts of time and information to a group of randomly selected everyday people and facilitate their deliberation on an issue that leads to finding common ground on a set of recommendations.

3. Demographic

Refers to the statistical characteristics collected about a segment of the population, such as their age, gender, occupation, ethnicity, geographic location, and socio-economic status.

4. DVC

(Deputy Vice-Chancellor) Senior academic staff member typically with managerial responsibilities who provides assistance in leadership to the institution, thereby supporting the Vice-Chancellor. Typically, a DVC will be an executive staff member and therefore responsible for numerous divisions, including but not limited to academic, research, and other portfolios as required.

5. Equity Collectives

A number of persons considered as a 'whole' who have a marked similarity. This 'whole' is typically brought together through their shared inequality, marginalisation and injustice. In the context of Western Sydney University, these equity collectives are the Women's Collective, Queer Collective, Disability Collective, Ethno-Cultural Collective, Indigenous Collective, Environment Collective, International Collective

6. First in Family (first-generation student)

A higher education student whose parents/guardians completed no higher than secondary education.

7. Geographic Dispersion

Physical spread of individuals across distant locations. This typically necessitates the use of technology support for instances such as group study, student representative meetings, student club meetings, and for students to connect with staff when mobility is decreased.

8. Governance

The system by which an organisation processes its decisions and is directed and controlled. It is the act of overseeing the structure, process, and direction within an institution to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, stability and inclusiveness.

9. Highest Parent Attainment

Refers to the highest level of education completed by parents/guardians as identified by the student and is typically measured from secondary to tertiary education. education.

10. LGA

The local government area (LGA) is a division of a country that a local government is responsible for.

11. NESB (non-english speaking background)

Individuals who are either born in a non-English-speaking country or have parents who are born in a non-English speaking country, and do not speak English as a first language. NESB Individuals may or may not have a working knowledge of the English language but are not fluent in it. Typically, these individuals are migrants, international students, or refugees.

12. Permanent Humanitarian Visa

Granted to individuals subject to substantial discrimination in their home country, which amounts to a violation of a human right. This visa allows the individual to become a permanent resident of Australia, meaning they are allowed to stay in Australia indefinitely with access to Medicare, education, and work.

13. Provost

The role of a senior staff member to provide strong leadership and decision making, to advance the university's on-campus experience. There are seven campus provost staff members at WSU, who play a vital role in ensuring each campus is welcoming and accessible for staff, students, and local community groups. This is done through encouraging external and intra-campus engagement initiatives.

14. PVC

(Pro Vice-Chancellor) Senior academic staff member typically with managerial responsibilities who aid in leadership to the institution, thereby supporting the DVC/s and VC. Typically, a PVC will be in a position of authority in areas such as student administration, academic affairs, student affairs, research and development and other such relevant areas of responsibility. Although normally in an executive role PVCs are usually subordinate to DVCs

15. RHDR

Refers to students and candidates of Research and Higher Degree by Research degrees/courses of study.

16. Socio-economic status (SES)

The position or standing of an individual or group's social standing or class, relative to others. This measure is typically based on a combination of social, economic, and educational factors. Examining this status often reveals inequalities relating to privilege, power, and control.

17. SSAF (Student Services and Amenities Fees)

The fee payable by students at the University to the University under the Higher Education Legislation Amendment (Student Services and Amenities) Bill 2010 for the purposes of providing students with access to services and resources. Examples of these resources and services can be referred to on page 28.

18. Student Campus Council

At Western Sydney University, following the dissolution of the last student union, circa 2010, a student representative model was formed which included a student campus council for each of the Bankstown, Campbelltown, Hawkesbury, Parramatta, and Penrith campuses, composed of directly elected student members. Each student campus council internally elected three student members to an overarching student representative council.

19. Student Engagement

The sense of connection and belonging a student feels within their institution of study. This can be done through participating in extracurricular activities, involvement in governance, expressing student voice and involvement in student leadership opportunities. Western Sydney University major student orientation events such as WesternFair, and weekly activities such as 'Community Table' are examples of student engagement experiences driven through events.

20. Student Leaders

In the context of Western Sydney University, this group comprises all student representatives, student editors, student club leaders, collective officers, student casuals working within the student community space and community advisors. Unlike student ambassadors, student leaders put the needs and wants of the student as the basis of their decision making, with the aim to improve the overall student experience. This can be done through voicing student concern, organising events

and activities, and participating in consultation with the university.

21. Stupol (Student Politics)

The concept of politically active higher education students who collectively speak or act out in the interest of political change. Examples of stupol action include Anti-War protests, opposing heavy higher education fee deregulation, campaigning for the prevention of sexual assault on campus and more. The involvement in StuPol is for many students while studying is to be involved in or to create change, however, it is often observed the experiences can be interwoven with the clashing of opposing politics, which can create factionalism, division on councils and other mechanisms that emulate a nation-state's governing political spectrum.

22. Student Representative Council (SRC)

Following the change to the Student Representation model in 2019, the SRC at Western Sydney University has 24 directly elected representatives. They fulfil a number of functions on campus, including advocating student rights and wishes, organising social events and voicing student concern in consultation with the University.

23. Student Union

Early student unionism broadly reflected the large desire of extending social opportunities for members, however, throughout the labour movement and with the access of working-class students to higher education, student unionism coincided with broad social change. The turn of the century has seen a decline in higher education students' involvement in activism. Many student unions, representative councils, guilds, and relative student associations still exist today, usually with varying levels of relationships with their institution.

24. Student Voice

When students actively participate in decision-making at their higher education institution, they are empowered to shape their educational experiences. It is often found that more successful institutions deeply and intrinsically value the student voice. This can be demonstrated by not only listening to perspectives and opinions of

students, but also acting on them in a way that genuinely shapes the learning, decision-making, and overall student experience at the institution.

25. W'SUP

The student news media at Western Sydney University. Six (6) elected students and one (1) appointed Director of Student Publications oversee the editing of the print and online publications.



