



HULL UNIVERSITY UNION ELECTIONS REPORT 2019

Context

This report, and the recommendations included, have been developed using information drawn from SUMS voting data, complaint data, feedback provided through a candidate survey, social media marketing statistics and feedback from the debrief meeting of the Assistant Returning Officer and Marketing teams.

Nomination Period

The notice of election was publicised on the [Hull University Union website](#) on 20th December 2018. Nominations were open online between 27th February - 6th March 2019. Throughout the entire duration of the elections, students were kept informed through all-student emails, social media posts, posters and electronic screens around campus. Stalls were held during February in a range of locations across the university site which promoted elections in general in addition to the range of elected roles available. Newly designed banner stands and a backdrop in a different colour palette from other Students' Union marketing helped election promotional activities be eye-catching and stand out. The design and messaging of the marketing campaign was informed by feedback from student focus groups to try and ensure that it would be relevant and of interest to a broad spectrum of students. Feedback from the student staff members who led on promoting elections indicated that whilst it was useful to have information stalls during this period, some of the locations chosen were too quiet to attract many students, and too many dates were allocated for this activity, so this is something that we will address in 2020.

Five weekly information meetings were held throughout February and early March to inform students who were potentially interested in being a candidate about the available roles, their duties, the election process and what submitting a nomination and campaigning would entail. The sessions were scheduled for a range of different days and times to make them as accessible as possible for students, and the number of meetings was increased from two last year to five due to the number of candidates who missed the meetings and then requested the contents at a later date. These were attended by 21 students in total in the lead up to nominations closing.

This year, students were encouraged to sign up to a candidate mailing list to receive regular detailed emails with targeted messages and guidance for those planning to run in the election, up until the close of nominations. Emails included reminders about key dates, links to essential documents and further information about aspects such as manifesto-writing and campaigning. 24 students subscribed to this mailing list, and it was an effective way of communicating relevant information just with candidates,

rather than with the whole student population, as had happened to an extent in previous years.

Online candidate handbooks were available for both President and Part-time Officer candidates, comprising more information about the roles, tips on how to run a successful campaign, and ideas about what previous Presidents and Part-time Officers had achieved. The Hull University Union elections website included useful information including detailed role descriptions for each position, the handbooks, the election rules & regulations and useful candidate resources to provide more background information for candidates' manifestos.


Staff and students were given the opportunity to recommend students that they thought would make good election candidates; university and union staff were invited to email the elections inbox with suggested names, and students were encouraged to use the "Refer a Friend" function on the elections website. 23 students' names were suggested in these ways, all of whom were then emailed to let them know that someone had put their name forward as someone who would make an excellent election candidate, with further details about how to find out more including relevant website links and dates of information meetings.

Table 1. Nominations Received

Position	2019		2018	
	Full time President positions (5)	Part-time Officer positions (23)	Full time President positions (5)	Part-time Officer positions (22)
Nominations received	17 (1 withdrawn)	7	19 (1 withdrawn)	7
Contested positions	5	0	5	1
Uncontested positions	0	7	0	5
No nominations received	0	16	0	16
Total	24		26	

In addition, this year there were 4 Student Trustee vacancies, and 4 candidates nominated themselves for these roles. These candidates were required to submit their nominations at an earlier date in order to allocate sufficient time to attend an interview panel before the campaigning and voting period.

As can be seen from Table 1, all President positions were contested but there was a slight dip in the number of candidates for full-time roles compared to 2018. Similarly, a low number of candidates ran for part-time officer positions which will lead to more roles available in the by-elections for the 2019/20 academic year.



Some students have suggested that both the marketing and timing of part-time officer elections, both in terms of the main elections and the by-elections, should be looked at more closely to find ways of attracting a greater number of candidates for these roles. In light of the number of unfilled roles and this feedback, this is something that we will research over the summer to help inform part-time officer elections next year.

When asked whether they found the nominations process clear, candidates stated “yes” or “yes to an extent”.

Campaigning and Budgets

Campaigning opened after the All Candidates Meeting on Friday 8th March and ended with the close of voting on Friday 15th March 2019 at 3pm. All President candidates were entitled to a budget of up to £75 of which 100% was reimbursed by Hull University Union. All other candidates were entitled to a budget of £15. President candidates were again able to request their campaign budget in advance instead of waiting to submit expenses at the end of campaigning, to ensure that they were able to afford the costs of essentials such as covering the costs of food and bills during the election period. Two students made use of this offer.

The daily report by the Returning Officer Team detailing the submitted complaints was available online. The External Returning Officer for this election was Lydia Blundell, Head of Engagement at Huddersfield Students’ Union. Eight formal complaints were received during the voting period, six of which were upheld, which resulted in warnings being issued to candidates and two candidates being required to stop campaigning early. Please note that as a governance referendum was being held at the same time as the elections, the Returning Officer Report also includes complaints which were made regarding the referendum.

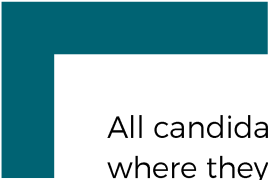
Support for Candidates

An Elections Campaigns Workshop was held on Monday 18th February for any students considering running in the election and interested in finding out more about how to effectively run an election campaign. This was delivered by external facilitator Stephen Dowson of Stand & Be Counted. Eight students attended this session and actively engaged in the training. Candidates who attended the workshop stated that they found it excellent in terms of usefulness.

Candidate feedback included the following comments:

“It was really engaging and very very much worth my time going! 10/10 would go again!”

“learnt a lot about keeping true to yourself - the importance of being preferred and chatting to everyone you can”



All candidates were invited to the All Candidates Meeting on Friday 8th March where they were briefed on the election rules and essential campaign tips. This meeting was mandatory for all President candidates and optional for other candidates.

All President candidates were also required to attend one-to-one meetings with the Assistant Returning Officer to discuss their manifesto and campaign plans and sign the trustee declaration form before the close of nominations. All candidates were invited to meet with the Returning Officer Team with any queries at any time during office hours throughout the elections period.

During campaigning, all candidates were able to access the former HullSTARS office as a space to leave any campaign materials or relax from campaigning. Snacks were provided for candidates and their campaign teams. This was welcomed by candidates.


Candidates were encouraged to take time out from campaigning through a number of events offering refreshments, including tea and toast every morning of voting week, a pizza lunch one day and an afternoon refresher drink in Scoop. The majority of President candidates engaged with at least one of these activities, and shared positive feedback about this:

“The drinks and the snacks were really appreciated as it was a chance to all sit together with like minded people.”

When candidates were asked whether they found the election rules and regulations clear, those completing the candidate survey stated “yes” or “yes to an extent”. However, there were a number of times when candidates sought clarification of the rules and regulations, especially around the use of social media, and therefore for Elections 2020 we will conduct more extensive research on elections rules about this at other students’ unions to help inform the wording of our own rules.

President candidates engaged well in the opportunity to debate their manifestos in a public forum at Candidates’ Question Time, which took place on the evening of Monday 11th March and was filmed and streamed through Facebook Live by a professional film crew this year, with a peak of 135 live viewers at any one time and a total estimated reach both live and post-event of 23,000 viewers. More people tuned in to watch Question Time this year than in 2018, and those that did watch were more likely to watch for longer. Having a professional crew in charge of the streaming and sound meant that viewers at home had a higher quality experience than in previous years, were better able to follow the debates and discussions, and submit relevant questions via Facebook. Audience members who attended the event were invited to submit questions via menti.com, and a varied selection of questions were asked of candidates.

This year Question Time was hosted by Victoria Winterton, a previous Sabbatical Officer and someone independent of Hull University Union to help ensure that the debate was facilitated fairly and transparently.



Candidate suggestions to improve Question Time include the idea of holding a similar event for Part-Time Officer candidates, to help raise the profile of these positions and boost turnout in these elections, and increasing the amount of seating available for audience members.

Satisfaction with the support that candidates received during elections from the Returning Officer Team was expressed, including the following feedback:

“I got the guidance I need and even more than I thought I needed at first. I got info on some things I did not cross my mind at all. This was really helpful.”

“...the support received this year was outstanding, the candidates room was so well received and I feel as though we were all in competition that we were all pretty friendly with each other this year”

Voting and Turnout

Voting opened online on Tuesday 12th March at 9am and closed on Friday 15th March at 3pm. This was a reduction in the number of days that voting was open, from five down to four days, in order to ensure that students had the opportunity to watch Question Time on Monday and be better informed about the different candidates' priorities and manifestos before voting during the rest of the week. Following feedback in 2018 from some students who indicated that they voted before watching Question Time, but then after seeing how the candidates performed would have voted differently, the decision was made to trial moving the opening of voting to after this event to see if this would improve voter engagement.

Voting closed at 3pm on the last day rather than at 5pm as in previous years to give the Returning Officer Team some more time to deal with complaints and process the results.

All candidates had to stand against Re-Open Nominations (R.O.N.) and Single Transferable Vote (STV) was used to determine the winner.

In addition to the general elections marketing campaign, Hull University Union engaged students in the importance of the elections by encouraging them to vote at voting booths specifically set up for this purpose in the Library and Hull University Union every day during voting week and staffed by a mix of Hull University Union student staff and permanent staff members.

The Marketing team made effective use of social media in a range of ways, including pitting sports teams and societies against one another to encourage voter turnout and sharing the video debates from Question Time.


Table 2. Voter turnout

Year	Voting period	Turnout (%)	Number of unique voters	Number of total votes cast
2019	12-15 March (4 days)	16.6	2,698	18,827
2018	12-16 March (5 days)	14.8	2,584	16,614
2017	20-24 March (5 days)	14.8	2,631	21,797
2016	29 Feb-4 March (5 days)	15.6	2,808	31,965
2015	24 Feb-5 March (10 days)	19.7	3,559	20,901
2014	28 Feb-6 March (7 days)	20.9	3,771	63,870

Table 3. Number of total votes for President races

Position	2019		2018	
	Number of votes for winning candidate	Number of votes for race	Number of votes for winning candidate	Number of votes for race
President of the Students' Union	1209 (7.4%)	2328 (14.3%)	1455 (8.3%)	2224 (12.7%)
President of Education	737 (4.5%)	1554 (11.7%)	1271 (7.3%)	1990 (11.3%)
President of Activities	794 (4.9%)	1540 (9.5%)	560 (3.2%)	1925 (11%)
President of Sports	904 (5.6%)	1773 (10.1%)	765 (4.4%)	1893 (10.3%)
President of Inclusivity & Diversity/President of Welfare & Community	799 (4.9%)	1679 (10.3%)	1037 (5.9%)	1974 (11.3%)

Voter turnout increased from 14.8% in 2018 to 16.6% in 2019 – up by 1.8%. This was an additional 114 individuals who voted this year, which is encouraging, especially given the fact that this year there was one fewer day of voting.



Unfortunately some technical difficulties with voting were identified. These were addressed during the elections, including a delay in the opening of voting and some text which was initially incorrectly formatted. On the last day of voting, a small number of students highlighted that the names of candidates were slightly misaligned. In light of this feedback, we plan to run a set of “dummy elections” in advance of the 2019/20 by-elections to test out and improve the election webpage design and functionality.

Results and Feedback

The full results are available [online](#).

Results night took place on Friday 15th March from 7pm in Hull University Union's Sanctuary Bar, four hours after voting had closed.


This year the event was again hosted by someone independent of Hull University Union, Stephen Dowson, to help ensure that the announcement of results was carried out in an impartial and celebratory manner, in recognition of the achievements of everyone who had been involved in the elections. The event was also covered on social media so that those not attending could see the results.

All candidates were offered a free drink voucher at the results night, which was appreciated, although there was also the suggestion that it would be nice for them to be able to also provide free drinks for campaign team members.

Whilst feedback on the results night was positive, some students have highlighted that the event in its current form does not feel special or celebratory enough for candidates and their campaign teams. Therefore for 2019, we will look to address this through venue dressing, earlier set up and cordoning off a section of the venue specifically for the results night.

Recommendations for 2020

- To strengthen the working relationship with the University in the lead up to and during elections in order to ensure consistent communication to students.
- To keep the budget of President candidates at £75 each with 100% of this budget being reimbursed to ensure that all President candidates can spend the same amount on their campaign regardless of their personal financial circumstances. To continue to offer this budget to all candidates as cash advance to ensure candidates do not have to spend their monthly allowance on campaign material instead of food or other necessary items.
- To keep the budget for Part-Time Officer candidates to £15 and reimburse 100% of that budget.

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- To rewrite the rules and regulations for Hull University Union Elections so that they provide greater clarity for all interested students, including more stringent and precise social media guidance.
 - To start advertising and marketing of the elections in Trimester 1 with more information about the representative structure, process, timeline and available positions, including a separate targeted marketing for Part-Time Officer positions.
 - To again provide weekly candidate information meetings in Trimester 2 in the lead up to nominations closing, and have a mailing list specifically for potential candidates.
 - To use recommend a friend function for students to suggest peers who may be interested in running in the election.
 - To again schedule Question Time to take place before voting opens, to ensure this can inform all voters' decisions.
 - To hold a Question Time style event for Part-Time Officer candidates.
 - To provide a briefing for candidates before Question Time to cover public speaking and debating skills and etiquette.
 - To share any Q & A's between candidates and the Returning Officer team to all candidates on an ongoing basis, to improve transparency of information for all.
 - To retain the room for candidates to provide a space for them to store materials and relax during campaigning.
 - To provide resources and support for candidates to create hand-made placards and signs if they wish to.
 - To work with Facilities team to explore creating and siting temporary hoarding for additional candidate campaign space.
 - To hold dummy elections in advance of the October by-elections in order to test out and improve all website functionality and design. As part of this, research other unions' elections, specifically Lincoln who use the same system as us.
 - To improve the results night experience by including the number of votes in each round on the Powerpoint presentation, rather than just names. Use event dressing, music, cordoned off area to create a more distinct special event.
 - To consider provision of some staff support and information over the weekend when campaigning begins; this would aid with clarification of rules for those candidates who require it and also be an opportunity to address any issues or complaints which arise over the weekend rather than needing to wait until Monday morning.
 - To develop the nomination process for President candidates so that it mirrors the requirement for student trustee candidates to attend a panel interview prior to nominations being approved for voting, in order to improve the robustness of safeguarding and ensure candidates' suitability and understanding of trustee role and responsibilities.

Nicole Steele
Student Voice Manager
April 2019

Appendix

Table 4. Voter Turnout by Faculty

Faculty	Turnout
Faculty of Science and Engineering	875 (23.6%)
Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education	615 (15.9%)
Faculty of Business, Law and Politics	638 (19.1%)
Faculty of Health Sciences	556 (10.8%)
Students Union	4 (44.4%)
Research and Enterprise	9 (5.1%)

Table 5. Voter Turnout by Year of Study

Year of Study	Turnout
0	70 (17%)
1	856 (13.4%)
2	817 (19.2%)
3	756 (18%)
4	184 (22%)
5	10 (5.8%)
6	0
7	1 (9.1%)
N/A	4 (0.7%)

Table 6. Voter Turnout by Mode of Study

Mode of Study	Turnout
Full-time	2651 (18.9%)
Part-time	43 (1.9%)
N/A	4 (0.7%)

Table 7. Voter Turnout by Type of Study

Type of Study	Turnout
Postgraduate	261 (9.4%)
Undergraduate	2433 (18%)