



HULL UNIVERSITY UNION PRESIDENT ELECTIONS REPORT 2021

Context

This report, and the recommendations included, has been developed using information drawn from SUMS voting data, complaint data, feedback provided through candidate surveys, social media marketing statistics and feedback from Marketing colleagues and the Assistant Returning Officer team.

Nomination Period

The original notice of election was publicised on [HUSU's website on 16th December 2020](#). The initial plan was for nominations for both President and Part-Time Officer positions to open during Welcomefest Reunion at the end of January, and to have two separate periods of training, campaigning and voting for the full-time paid and part-time volunteer positions, with results planned to be announced for the President roles on 1st March and for Part-Time Officer roles on 22nd March.

Due to the national lockdown coming into place in early January, and the lack of clarity around when the majority of students would be permitted to return to campus for in-person lectures, the decision was made by the Board to withdraw the notice of elections and to delay the elections until a later date when students would be more likely to be able to engage in both running and voting. The notice was [withdrawn on 11th January with this statement online](#), and there was then a period of time when alternative dates were planned and proposed.

The [updated notice of elections](#) was published on 9th March. Due to the delayed timeline for the elections, the decision was taken to hold the President elections in April, and to move all Part-Time Officer elections to the start of the 2021/22 academic year, in line with the usual by-elections timing, and to avoid holding elections in the assessment period for students.

Due to the national lockdown and campus-wide restrictions, Student Central was closed to students and the majority of staff during this period, meaning that all promotion was conducted digitally, through HUSU's website and social media channels. HUSU also worked in partnership with the University to spread the word to students, including through Student Futures (the new name for the Careers Service).

A significant proportion of content was centred around short interviews with former sabbatical officers sharing their experiences and the benefits of running for election, as well as encouraging the wider student body to vote. The current President of Education Simeon Orduen, currently in his second term and therefore unable to rerun in this year's elections, also created some videos to encourage students to run in the elections.

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 "Recommend a Friend" function on the elections webpage. 7 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.

Nominations were open online between 15th-26th March 2021. As in 2020, in the initial stage of a nomination, candidates simply needed to put their name forward against the role(s) for which they were interested in running.

They were then invited to attend a mandatory Candidate Briefing, and optional Campaign and Manifesto-Writing training, before being required to submit their manifesto by the deadline of 7th April.

Table 1. Nominations Received for 5 President positions

	2021	2020
Initial nominations received	34	13
Manifestos submitted (i.e. final number of candidates)	12	10
Contested positions	5	3
Uncontested positions	0	2

The growth in the number of initial nominations made compared to last year was encouraging, although it was disappointing that a higher proportion of these students did not submit manifestos in order to become election candidates. We do not have data on the discrepancy between these two figures, other than a small number who disclosed that they had existing commitments which would preclude them from being able to fulfil the working hours and training period for the President team. There is a strong likelihood that some students put their names forward for roles out of interest in the opportunities, but then once they had found out more about the elections process, decided that it was not a good fit for them.



Campaigning and Budgets

Candidate names and manifestos were published on HUSU's website on Friday 9th April at 12 noon – at this point, campaigning was permitted to begin.

Campaigning ended with the close of voting on Friday 16th April at 5pm.

All candidates were entitled to a budget of up to £90 of which 100% was reimbursed by HUSU. As in previous years, 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. Three candidates made use of this offer.

The Returning Officer for this election was Stephen Dowson, known as Dows, external consultant from Stand & Be Counted.

No formal complaints were made during this election.

Support for Candidates

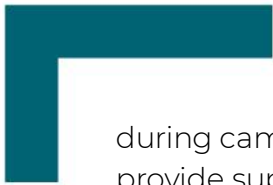
The mandatory Candidate Briefing played a vital part in providing information to candidates. During this virtual meeting, the Returning Officer ran through the election rules and answered any questions, the Chief Executive Officer explained what the role of a President consists of, the Chair of the Board of Trustees was in accordance and the Assistant Returning Officer team detailed the elections process and support available for candidates.

Online training in manifesto-writing and campaign planning was provided by Nicole and Elise, the Assistant Returning Officer team. Whilst this was optional, candidates were strongly encouraged to attend in order to develop the skills and knowledge to write an effective and focused manifesto, as well as to plan an elections campaign which would be wholly digital. Due to the fact that this was delivered via Microsoft Teams, the sessions were recorded and then distributed alongside the PowerPoint slides to all candidates.

Of the five candidates who completed the feedback survey and had attended the training, all stated that they had found the training very useful.

All candidates were also invited to attend digital drop-in sessions and one-to-one meetings with the Assistant Returning Officer team to discuss their manifesto and campaign plans, as well as ask any questions they may have had about the elections.

Due to Covid restrictions, it was not possible to provide a candidate relaxation space as in prior years. However, following feedback from some candidates that they would appreciate some in-person support rather than just online,



during campaigning week, the Assistant Returning Officer team were able to provide support by using the outdoor tables in the Sanc Beer Garden as a space to meet with candidates and answer queries. Eight out of the 12 candidates made use of this provision.

When candidates were asked whether they found the election rules and regulations clear, the majority answered 'yes', but one person highlighted there was some confusion around the rule about campaigning in closed and open groups on social media, and suggested that this was an area to work on greater clarity for in the future.

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 12th April and was live streamed via StreamYard through Facebook Live and YouTube by the student media team from Torch TV. It was a new experience for everyone involved to hold a wholly digital question time event, but feedback from candidates strongly suggests that they found it a useful event for both candidates and voters.

The viewer statistics for Question Time indicate that Facebook was by far the preferred platform with 3,000+ people reached, approximately 1,100 views, 1:07 average minutes watched and a total of 3,100 minutes watched. On YouTube there were 61 views by 47 unique viewers,

This year Question Time was hosted by Nicole Steele, HUSU's Student Voice Manager.

Feedback on the support and information received from the Assistant Returning Officer Team was that candidates found it 'very helpful' – all six of those that filled in the feedback survey stated this.

Voting and Turnout

Voting opened online on Monday 12th April at 9pm, straight after Question Time, and closed on Friday 16th April at 5pm.

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

Due to social distancing restrictions, HUSU staff were not able to provide voting booths or information stands to promote the elections, or to encourage and support voters.

The Marketing team promoted the elections across a range of social media channels, and used humour and recent current affairs including experiences of the pandemic and the US presidential elections in order to attract members to the posts and encourage them to engage in the elections at all stages.

Table 2. Voter turnout

Year	Voting period	Turnout (%)	Number of unique voters	Number of total votes cast
2021	12-16 April (4.5 days)	7.7	1,177	4,980
2020	2-5 March (2.75 days)	13.2	2,152	9,134
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

- Please note that the significantly higher number of total votes cast in 2019 and prior years is related to the fact that Part-Time Officer and Student Trustee elections were held at the same time as Sabbatical Officer elections.

As can be seen from the above table, there was a significant decrease in the number and proportion of students voting in this year’s elections compared to previous years.

Whilst this is disappointing, it is in line with what has been happening across the sector this year, and is not unexpected given the fact that all campaigning was remote, and due to Covid restrictions both staff and candidates were unable to have a physical presence on campus to encourage students to vote. In addition, the multiple challenges being experienced by so many members over the past year has led to a downturn in the number engaging with a range of HUSU activity and social media.

The table overleaf displays the total number of votes in each Presidential race, as well as the number of votes cast for the winning candidate in each case.

Table 3. Number of total votes for President races

Position	2021		2020	
	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	508	1034	1261	1832
President of Education	548	997	963	1956
President of Activities	444	943	1293	1712
President of Sports	581	1055	1042	1818
President of Inclusivity & Diversity	470	951	957	1760

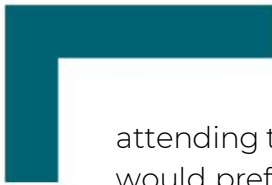
Results and Feedback

The full results are available [on the HUSU website](#).

Results night took place on Tuesday 20th April from 5.30pm in the Sanc Beer Garden, with tables reserved for candidates and a limited number of their campaign team members/friends and family.

This year, the results announcement took place four days (two working days) after the close of voting. This decision was made to ensure that there was sufficient time for processes to be fully conducted, including the submission and checking of candidate expenses receipts, and to allow time for dealing with any complaints which may have been submitted on the last day of voting. In addition, Monday 19th April had already been designated as the final Union Council meeting of the year, and it was deemed important to keep this meeting and the election results announcement separate, to ensure that members of Council could focus on the business at hand rather than be distracted by the emotions and excitement of the results being announced.

Another difference this year was making a private announcement of the results to the candidates prior to the public announcement. This was due to the fact that, as candidates had conducted their whole campaigns digitally rather than physically, it was deemed to be fairer, and better for candidates' mental health, to share the results with them in private initially so that candidates could decide whether or not they would feel comfortable



attending the in-person public announcement shortly afterwards, or if they would prefer to go home and spend some time in private dealing with the results.

For support, candidates were encouraged to attend with a member of their household/support bubble. The Assistant Returning Officer team shared the results and members of HUSU's Senior Leadership Team were present to provide any additional support or information should it be sought.

All candidates were offered free drinks and pizza at the results night to help them celebrate their achievements.

Recommendations for 2022

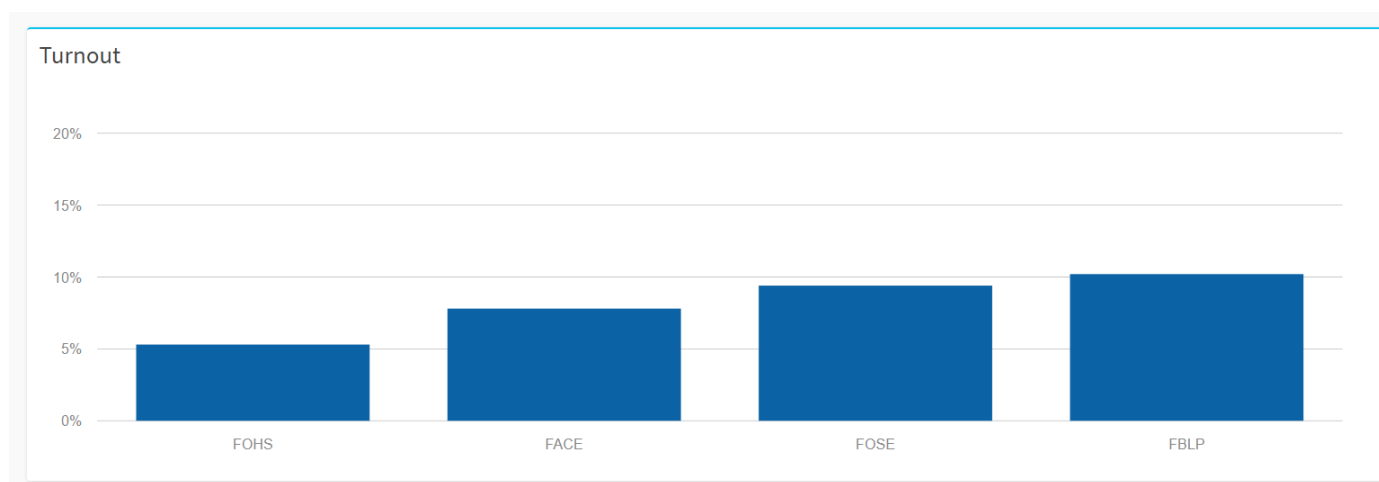
- Further develop the working relationship with the University in the lead up to and during elections in order to ensure consistent communication to students; specifically to work with the University's Marketing team and Student Futures teams to promote the opportunities to run for elected roles.
- Keep the budget of President candidates at £90 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.
- Annually review the HUSU Elections rules with the Returning Officer to ensure clarity for all.
- Plan the elections schedule for the 2021/2022 academic year during summer 2021 and as early as possible, in order to work with the Marketing team on a comprehensive communications plan for the year to communicate this with members.
- Consider the use of the elections app provided by SUMS for the October by-elections to increase accessibility for members and improve their voting experience.
- Review the voter incentives HUSU offers to members in order to drive up engagement; to take into consideration research in the sector and recommended ideas from the Marketing team.
- Continue to work with Torch TV, JAM Radio and Hullfire on elections coverage, including planning and exploring how best to live stream Question Time.

- Following the experience of some candidates being unable to use paid-for adverts on Facebook, and due to the messaging being related to elections and voting requiring additional identity verification, provide more in-depth information about this in campaign training.
- If in -person elections are permitted by law and University restrictions, to retain the room for candidates to provide a space for them to store materials and relax during campaigning.
- 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.

Nicole Steele
 Student Voice Manager
 May 2021

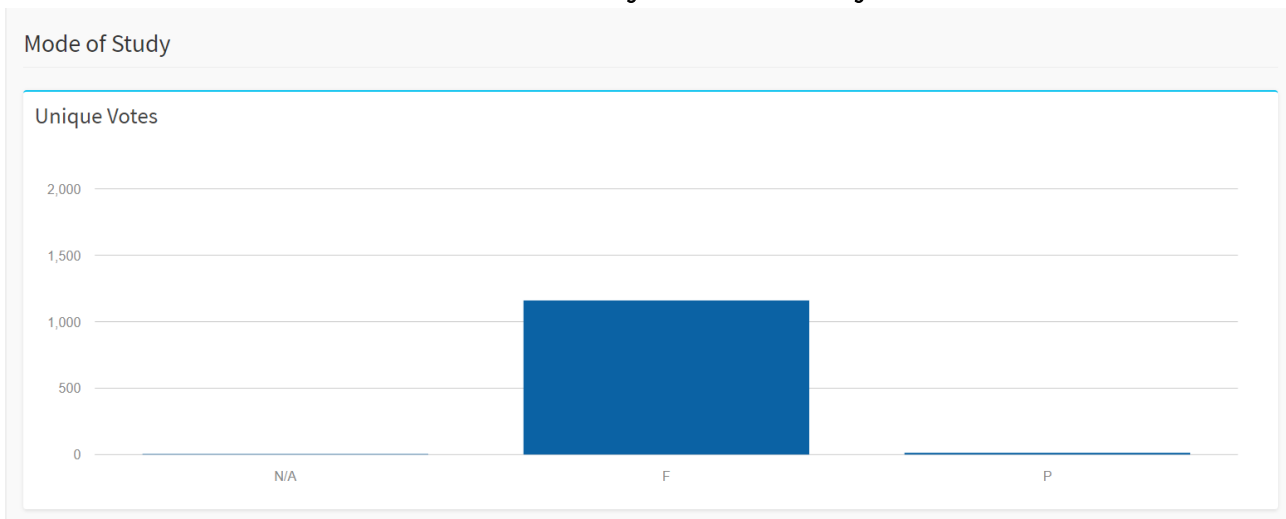
Appendix

Table 4. Voter Turnout by Faculty



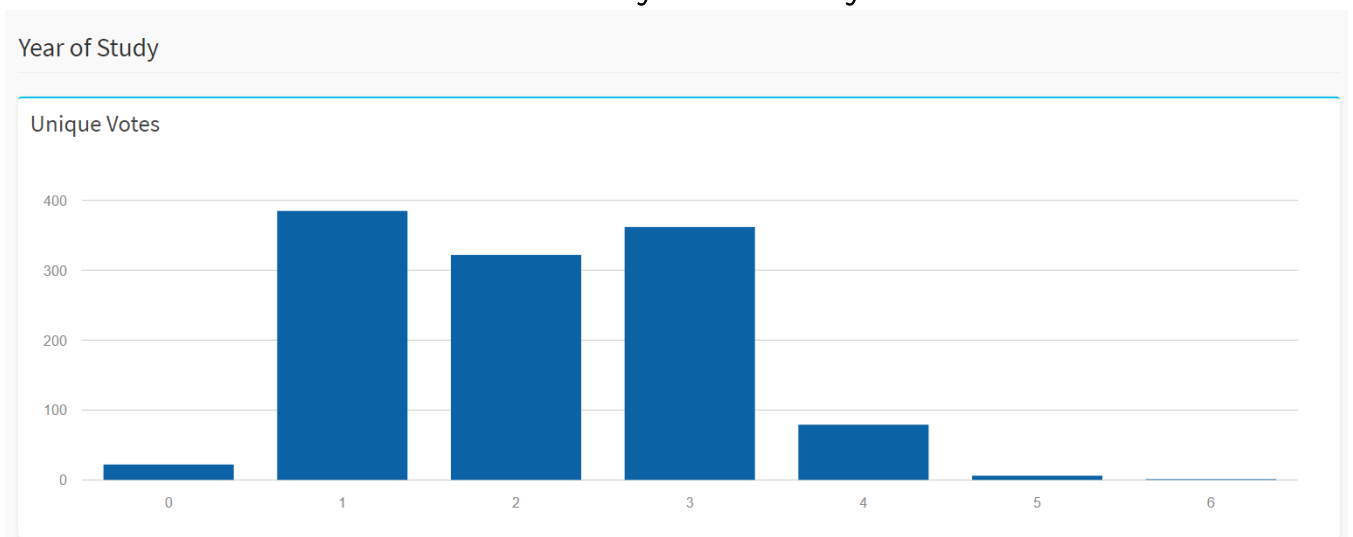
Faculty	Number of individual voters	Percentage of students from Faculty
Faculty of Health Sciences	285	5.3%
Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education	274	7.8%
Faculty of Science and Engineering	300	9.4%
Faculty of Business, Law and Politics	314	10.2%

Table 5. Voter Turnout by Mode of Study



Mode of Study	Number of individual voters	Percentage of students from mode of study
Full-time	1160	8.7%
Part-time	13	0.7%
N/A	4	0.6%

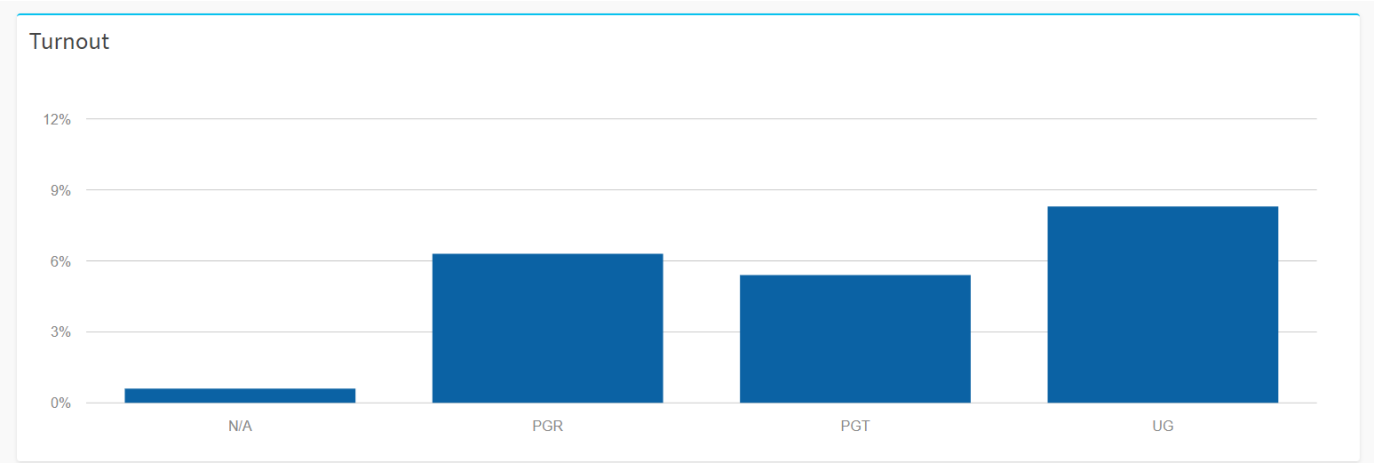
Table 6. Voter Turnout by Year of Study



Year of Study	Turnout	Percentage of students from Year of Study
0	22	5.6%
1	385	6.2%
2	322	8%
3	362	9.5%
4	79	11.8%
5	6	4.4%

6	1	3.1%
---	---	------

Table 7. Voter Turnout by Type of Study



Type of Study	Number of individual voters	Percentage of students from type of study
Postgraduate Research	57	6.3%
Postgraduate Taught	102	5.4%
Undergraduate	1014	8.3%
N/A	4	0.6%