



**Imperial College Union Governance Committee**

**17/5/18**

<b>AGENDA ITEM NO.</b>	7
<b>TITLE</b>	Leadership Elections Review
<b>AUTHOR</b>	Jarlath O'Hara
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<p>Key recommendations from the review of LE18 are that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There must be a Project Manager who is a Senior Manager and who is not responsible for the administrative tasks. There must therefore be an assigned, appropriate administrative support function.</li> <li>• There must be clearly communicated objectives regarding the success of the elections with measures beyond turnout alone.</li> <li>• There must be a process from start to finish of the elections which is managed by the PM with oversight through Governance Sub-Committee.</li> <li>• The timetable must be set six months in advance.</li> <li>• Events with student dependencies must be confirmed six months in advance with clear expectations and support mechanisms in place.</li> <li>• Training sessions and materials must be devised with support for DROs that is more extensive than "ask the PM".</li> <li>• There must be a communication method devised which is not the responsibility of the Deputy Returning Officers to communicate with candidates during the election.</li> <li>• Performance management measures must be utilised to address recent and any future failings in fulfilling staff responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<b>PURPOSE</b>	For the committee to understand the causes of the dissatisfaction around the Leadership Elections and agree the necessary steps to address this.
<b>DECISION/ACTION REQUIRED</b>	To adopt the Key Recommendations regarding future elections cycles.

## Leadership Elections 2018 Review

### Introduction

The Leadership Elections are a flagship function for the Union as we are proud of our value of *Democracy* and of consistently having one of the highest turnouts in the UK.

Leadership Elections 2018 (LE18) was therefore a mixed story for us as, on the positive side, we had a competitive and democratically sound election with a comparatively high turnout. On the other hand, we had significant dissatisfaction with the organisation, communication and processes surrounding the elections.

Upon receiving complaints and being aware of further dissatisfaction on the back of LE18, the Union committed to undertaking a review of the elections and to doing whatever necessary to ensure that the necessary improvements would be realised.

### The statistics

LE18 involved approximately 700 positions, the majority of which are for Club, Society and Project (CSP) positions. Over 1300 nominations were received in total, with over 1000 students putting themselves forward as a candidate.

Turnout by year and level of study:

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Voters	6539	6496	6538	7258	7966	6704	6810
Turnout	41.1%	40.6%	39.31%	42.47%	45.47%	36.79%	35.65%
UG participation	58%	59%	60.2%	59.6%	61.3%	54.6%	56.7%
PGT participation	19%	17%	12.4%	18.3%	28.6%	18.6%	16.2%
PGR participation			16.4%	26.7%	25.0%	14.5%	10.4%

Turnout this year was 35.65% (6810 students), a reduction on LE17 (36.79%) and LE16 (45.47%). Participation by demographic was a mixed picture, with PG participation continuing a trend of decline since the peak year of 2016, yet UG participation was higher (as a percentage) in 2018 than in 2017. We have not succeeded in breaking past the 60% UG participation plateau identified last year and we have gone backwards on PG engagement. As the growth in our membership is disproportionately within PGs, this magnifies the effect of the volatility in PG engagement.

Despite the fall in participation, we achieved the highest turnout in England & Wales and fell to second place in the UK – St Andrews resumed its 2014 and 2015 position of the only SU with higher engagement.

This review did not focus on the factors affecting turnout, nor tackling PG engagement though it is likely that some of the weaknesses in the delivery and communication of LE18 had a negative impact on that engagement and turnout.

## The review

The Managing Director led the review with the primary purpose of identifying high-level recommendations which would be fulfilled to provide assurance to key stakeholders that future elections cycles would meet the high standards expected. The review primarily included:

- Survey feedback from LE18 candidates
- Interviews with Deputy Returning Officers and other staff involved in LE18
- Discussions with Officer Trustees and Felix Editor
- Written and in-person submissions from complainants
- Elections Communication Paper (Written by Felix Editor for Communications Committee)
- Autumn Elections Review (staff led review as normal process following elections cycle)

## Findings

The major findings of the review are set out below:

- There was insufficient separation between accountability and responsibility. The project lead took too many administrative tasks which were then not completed as/when required.
- The Elections Team was inadequately administered; participants should have been better supported to understand their specific allocated tasks.
- There were insufficient guidance materials and training for Deputy Returning Officers (DROs) and elections team with an over reliance upon knowledge and experience of key individuals.
- The new timetable was inadequately implemented, leading to occasional confusion within the elections team and widespread confusion amongst candidates.
- There was poor communication with media groups, including Felix and ICTV, reducing the quality of the Live Debates and risking the coverage within three Felix issues.
- There were errors in election materials, primarily an offensive error being made with regards to the name of the Disabilities Officer position.
- There was inadequate communication of the work of the DROs, leading to a perception that rules were being enforced unevenly and without transparency.
- The volume of communications work for DROs on top of the decision-making remit is too great for additional responsibilities to their existing roles.
- Candidate Briefing and Training sessions were poorly communicated and therefore poorly attended.
- There was a lack of success measures for the elections cycle other than turnout.

Key Candidate Survey feedback:

- Mixed feedback on the change of campaigning period – slight preference in favour of the change (54% agree rather than 38% disagree).
- Many comments to have campaigning open before voting starts even if only a short period.
- Communication of rules was not effective – 45% agreed that communication was effective and 46% disagree.
- Comments show that providing evidence / communication of rule enforcement was a greater problem.
- We should find additional ways of involving 1-yr masters students given the difficulty in them standing for positions.

## Conclusions

The combination of sources has resulted in many suggestions that merit being implemented and built in to future planning cycles. These are captured within the appendices.

The key recommendations included here are considered the essential steps required to provide assurance to stakeholders (Members, Trustees and College) that future elections will meet the standards expected.

- **There must be a Project Manager who is a Senior Manager and who is not responsible for the administrative tasks. There must therefore be an assigned, appropriate administrative support function.**
- **There must be clearly communicated objectives regarding the success of the elections with measures beyond turnout alone.**
- **There must be a process from start to finish of the elections which is managed by the PM with oversight through Governance Sub-Committee.**
- **The timetable must be set six months in advance.**
- **Events with student dependencies must be confirmed six months in advance with clear expectations and support mechanisms in place.**
- **Training sessions and materials must be devised with support for DROs that is more extensive than "ask the PM".**
- **There must be a communication method devised which is not the responsibility of the Deputy Returning Officers to communicate with candidates during the election.**
- **Performance management measures must be utilised to address recent and any future failings in fulfilling staff responsibilities.**

I propose that Governance Committee agree to adopt these key recommendations and to oversee their implementation for future election cycles. I further propose that the additional recommendations included in the appendices are built in to the project management of elections.

Jarlath O'Hara  
**Managing Director**  
**May 2018**

## **Appendices:**

- Autumn Elections Recommendations (Elections Team)
- Communications Review Recommendations (Felix Editor – for Communications committee)

## **Autumn Elections Recommendations:**

- Create a more detailed communication plan with specific actions and messages, with responsibilities allocated.
- Segment audience and target messages.
- Engage early with CUs and implement a strategy for working with them to increase engagement.
- Begin working with elected CU, ARN and WBRN volunteers in term 3, following Leadership Elections, so that relationships are built before start of new academic year.
- Debrief with ICSMSU to find out what their approach was and generate guidance for all CU Execs about how they can increase nomination and voter turnout in their areas.
- Identify the schedule of PG welcome talks to determine whether this aligns with the election schedule.
- Identify alternative ways to engage and communicate with PG community and what messages will be most effective.
- Review how CUs and other Reps are informed of contested/uncontested positions during the nomination period. (i.e. what should we tell them, what impact might this have if it is/isn't shared?)
- Establish the communication working group early to ensure sufficient time can go into planning and developing materials over the summer period to help balance workload of marketing & communication team.
- Develop a clear communication strategy for social and digital.
- Provide clarity over budget (how much, who owns it, how it is accessed).
- Boost posts on social media to increase reach.
- Increase visibility on all campuses.
- Start messaging on social before nomination period opens.
- Provide resources for CUs to distribute and potentially to edit as appropriate for their constituents.
- Review potential for Autumn Elections to be sponsored.
- Campaigning for 2 weeks (March) could be a barrier for some students which could impact on diversity of candidates.
- Review and update elections rules to ensure clarity.
- Create a support programme/package for candidates.
- Create material that has longevity and can be used for many election cycles (e.g. videos/guides that don't contain year specific information).
- Keep a presence on website all year with information about elections and candidate resources for those students who want to plan early.
- Increase efficiency and speed of dealing with complaints about 'rule breaking'.
- Schedule time (and supporting messaging) for students to claim expenses (for March).
- Utilise Promo Team student-staff to distribute flyers and to talk to people, perhaps including a pop-up stall across all sites to increase face-to-face reach.
- Create a filter for automatic replies.

- Plan a more structured approach to communicating with departments and distributing messages through their mailing lists.
- Create a 'nominate yourself' flyer to mirror the 'vote now' flyer.
- Create and distribute visual promotion at non-SK sites (e.g. posters or banners).
- Develop a more targeted communication plan for voting week.
- Review potential to support or deliver husting events in Autumn Elections.
- Work with Felix to have a greater presence and promotion ahead of voting.
- Create a process document for developers and users so there is less reliance on system team to troubleshoot.
- Hand over electoral role management to DROs.
- Automate results so that it updates eActivities.
- Automate outputs in spreadsheets to remove manual editing and merging of documents.
- Update stats page to reflect diversity of voters.

#### **Communications Review Recommendations:**

- Begin election planning next year with a thorough discussion of what the aims of communication should be, ensuring all communications from the Union are in accord with these aims.
- Allow the unilateral aim of increased voter turnout/candidates running to be questioned, in favour of a more multi-faceted communication policy.
- Put in place a form of structured oversight for communications, ensuring sub-editing is standard protocol.
- Put in place a set timeline at the beginning of the planning process, and do not change it beyond a certain date, e.g. end of Winter term.
- Ensure the timeline for LEs does not clash with other campaigns, prioritising the LEs wherever possible.
- Improve coverage to non-SK campuses, with both publicity material and staff support available.
- For each aspect of the communication strategy, identify which stakeholders need to be involved, when they should be contacted, and by whom.
- Offer a space on the elections working group to at least one OT as standard.
- Send regular updates to a core team within ICU, extending beyond the elections working group.