

Elections

A deep-dive into the data

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Back to Basics

▲ Strategic Priority

Elections are a significant and fundamental aim and enabler, and core to our mission. They are vital to support Union aims to challenge and reduce inequalities affecting students, and are a core element of our democratic and inclusive values.

▲ Delivering the basics well

This is about delivering elections to a good standard using the sector as a benchmark. Empowered staff using systems and ways of working which enable fair and democratic elections. Increasing the number of candidates and taking steps to improve diversity.

▲ Our focus

Being clear on what **'good'** looks like

Reviewing rules, process and systems

Increased candidate numbers and measuring their experience

Improved use of data and insight with a particular focus on diversifying candidates

Elections – an overview

▲ Why does Imperial College Union run elections?

Elections support us to **democratically** elect student representatives, from our part-time volunteers to our full time leaders.

Holding elections for major student roles is a key element of the 1994 Education Act pertaining to students' unions. It is also one of our **core values**.

▲ Who do we elect?

ICU elects **hundreds of representatives every year**, including over 300 academic and well being reps, liberation officers and networks, student trustees, council members, Constituent Union leaders and the full-time sabbatical roles.

CSP members also vote for CSP committees.

▲ When do we do elections?

We run four official election periods:

Autumn (academic/wellbeing reps, liberation networks, council members) – October

Horizon elections (Horizon representatives) – November

Leadership (sabbaticals, faculty reps, CSP leaders, CU leaders, trustees) – February/March

Summer (any roles which remain unelected) – June/July

We also run by-elections where necessary

▲ Who delivers elections?

Currently responsibility is held with the **Representation Team**, with key support from Systems, Marketing and Student Opportunities (who run the CSP elections).

SWOT analysis of elections

Strengths

- Imperial has a high turnout in elections compared with the sector.
 - Combining of CSP and other elections help promotion
- There is data accessible by faculty, department, PG/UG, fee status, and gender
 - Election dashboard

Weaknesses

- Full-time roles are not attractive to Imperial grads
 - We do not have access to useful data
- We cannot track/measure engagement from hard-to-reach cohorts
 - We do not have access to national resources/comparison data (e.g. via NUS)
 - eVoting is complex and hard to use
 - Single point of failure

SWOT

Opportunities

- New Representation Team with experience from across the sector
 - Better data gathering and insight
- Capacity to review the rules and regulations
 - More cross-team working to ensure the organisation works effectively to deliver elections

Threats

- Turnout decreasing year on year
- The eVoting system has over reliance on manual use of particular individuals
 - Continued failure to disengage hard to reach groups
- Students not wanting to run for full-time positions within the students' union

Turnout

Leadership elections turnout (PG/UG)

	Total		UG		PGT		PGR	
Year	Voters	Turnout	Voters	Turnout	Voters	Turnout	Voters	Turnout
2016	7966	45.5%	5820	61.3%	1117	28.6%	1029	25%
2017	6704	36.8%	5296	54.6%	635	14.5%	773	18.6%
2018	6810	35.7%	5587	56.7%	494	10.4%	729	16.2%
2019	8121	41.2%	6194	61.4%	848	16.9%	1079	23.6%
2020	6104	29.6%	4761	45.5%	722	13.8%	621	12.5%
2021	6212	27.2%	4634	40.9%	866	13.5%	712	14%
Strike Ref*	2502	10.4%	1717	14.3%	325	5%	460	8.5%

*in reference to the referendum held on the UCU strikes held in November 2021

Autumn elections turnout (PG/UG)

	Total		UG		PGT		PGR	
Year	Voters	Turnout	Voted	Turnout	Voted	Turnout	Voted	Turnout
2016	2569	26.1%	2569	26.1%	414	9.5%	154	3.6%
2017	3886	38.9%	3886	38.9%	844	17.4%	385	8.7%
2018	4358	42.8%	4358	42.8%	1413	27.5%	799	17.8%
2019	4792	45.2%	4792	45.2%	1442	26.5%	892	18.8%
2020	3219	27.9%	3219	27.9%	697	10.6%	186	3.6%
2021	3003	24.9%	2825	23.4%	491	7.5%	229	4.2%

Turnout (contd.)

Leadership election turnout (Faculty)

	2019		2020		2021		Strike Referendum Nov 2021	
	Voters	% Turnout	Voters	% Turnout	Voters	% Turnout	Voters	% Turnout
All	8121	41.2%	6104	29.6%	6212	27.2%	2502	10.4%
Engineering	3759	45.8%	3016	34.8%	2773	29.6%	1187	12.3%
Natural Sciences	2364	47%	1611	31.4%	1664	29.8%	822	13.8%
Medicine	1648	38.6%	1183	25.8%	1458	28.7%	363	6.7%
Non-faculty*	350	16%	294	13%	317	11.4%	25	13.3%
Business School*	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	105	3.9%

*The Business School as a department was grouped in the 'Imperial College' faculty prior to August 2021. From August 2021 onwards, the Business School department has been assigned into a 'Business School' faculty in the Union's databases.

Leadership election turnout (Fee status)

	2019		2020		2021		Strike Referendum Nov 2021	
	Voters	% Turnout	Voters	% Turnout	Voters	% Turnout	Voters	% Turnout
Home	3848	47.9%	2850	34.3%	2935	32.6%	1327	12.9%
Europe	1530	40.9%	1118	29.9%	1109	27.6%	387	15.3%
Overseas	2618	36.3%	2082	26.4%	2110	23.1%	743	7.1%
Other / Unknown	125	17.8%	54	7.6%	58	8.3%	45	7.8%

Turnout (contd.)

Leadership election turnout (Gender)

	2019		2020		2021		Strike Referendum Nov 2021	
	Voters	% Turnout	Voters	% Turnout	Voters	% Turnout	Voters	% Turnout
Female	3240	41.3%	2482	29.5%	2749	28.8%	869	8.5%
Male	4881	41.2%	3614	29.6%	3447	26.1%	1626	11.9%
Other / Unknown	0	0%	8	32.0%	16	22.2%	7	7.4%

Turnout: Analysis

- ▲ Turnout is decreasing year-on-year despite a growing student population
- ▲ There is significant disparity between UG/PG voting (particularly PGR)
- ▲ Turnout by faculty is relatively similar across the board, but lower in medicine (excluding non-faculty)
- ▲ Home students are more likely to vote than EU/Overseas students
- ▲ Despite a larger male population, turnout is higher amongst students who identify as women
- ▲ There is a lack of data on other hard-to-reach groups
- ▲ Overall turnout increases when CSP groups are elected at the same time

Candidates

Election	Total Voters/Electorate	Election Turnout	Positions	Candidates*	Turnout for Position
Leadership Elections 2017	6704/18222	36.8%	President DPCS DPE DPFS DPW Total	5 3 2 3 5 18	25.3% 19.4% 23% 19.7% 20.7%
Leadership Elections 2018	6810/19103	35.7%	President DPCS DPE DPFS DPW Total	10 1 1 3 2 17	21.2% 17.1% 18% 17.5% 17.3%
Leadership Elections 2019	8121/19697	41.2%	President DPCS DPE DPFS DPW Total	9 5 1 4 5 24	25.1% 20.3% 19% 20.3% 18.3%
Leadership Elections 2020	6104/20641	29.6%	President DPCS DPE DPFS DPW Total	5 2 2 2 3 14	17.3% 14.9% 13.4% 13.2% 12.8%
Leadership Elections 2021	6212/22822	27.2%	President DPCS DPE* DPFS DPW Total	3 4 2 2 2 13	18.1% 15.5% 14.6% 14.4% 13.8%

Candidates

- ▲ Candidate numbers have declined since 2019
- ▲ Number of candidates per position correlates with overall turnout in the elections
- ▲ Union President has the highest turnout and candidates
- ▲ We do not look at demographic information for OT candidates
- ▲ We have not looked at how candidates have previously engaged with the students' union (ie. Through CSPs/CUs/Representation)
- ▲ We have not adequately measured or evaluated candidate experience

Current activity

- ▲ The Representation team have developed an **operating plan** and an **equality impact assessment** for Leadership Elections this year – which focuses on outreach to students with protected characteristics and other hard to reach groups
- ▲ The Representation team is running ‘I can stand’ empowerment briefings for women, LGBT+, BME, Disabled and international students. The Liberation and Campaigns Officer is creating material for international students to explain what a union is
- ▲ The Marketing team is promoting the elections on multiple campuses
- ▲ The Representation team is evaluating the success of the Autumn elections

Recommendations

- ▲ ICU needs to adopt a new approach to elections which is **data-driven, targeted and focussed on strategic growth** as opposed to solving operational issues
- ▲ We recommend the following:
 - ▲ To request access to **College data** on **candidates** and **voters**
 - ▲ To **commence data collection** on categories through which students can **self-identify** into certain cohorts (e.g. LGBT+)
 - ▲ To **track the 'candidate journey'** – ie. How does a student engage with ICU prior to running for a leadership position in a leadership election
 - ▲ To work with **College career services** to better understand how to communicate the **employability** value of undertaking a role
 - ▲ To work with **hard-to-reach cohorts** to empower them to run and vote in the elections
 - ▲ To better understand how the **rest of the sector** manages elections so that ICU can learn from best practice
 - ▲ To examine whether the **current systems are fit for purpose** with a larger, more complex electorate

Any questions?

Thank you for listening

