

Autumn Elections - Review

1. Summary

1.1. The Autumn Elections 2016 (branded this year as *Autumn Elections: Take the Lead*) comprised the election of a variety of roles within our democratic structures. This included:

- 1.1.1. Ordinary Members of Council (proportionally distributed across Faculties)
- 1.1.2. The majority of Year Rep, Course Rep and Group Rep positions within the Academic Representation Network
- 1.1.3. Vacancies that have arisen over the summer within Constituent Unions, Academic Representation Network, Liberation Team and CSPs with over 150 members.

1.2. The elections took place under the following initial timetable:

Nominations opened	00:01	Saturday 1 October
Nominations closed	23:59	Thursday 13 October
Manifesto deadline	Noon	Friday 14 October
Voting opened	Noon	Monday 17 October
Voting closed	Noon	Friday 21 October

1.3. At the close of nominations, there were 308 roles available, with 419 candidates standing.

1.4. The Autumn Elections 2016 (AE16 from now on) were significantly impacted by a pair of technical incidents which affected voting, as well as a number of other factors which affected the support and delivery of the election cycle. While the elections team managed to deliver a reliable set of election results and the Academic Representation Network has begun to operate for the year, it is important to recognise the gravity of these incidents.

1.5. A number of important lessons can be learnt from AE16, which must be factored into planning for the upcoming Leadership Elections 2017 and all future elections cycles.

2. Preparation for the Elections – issues arising and recommendations for future elections

2.1. The majority of preparation work was undertaken by Phil Stewart (PS), Nayab Cheema (NC and India Jordan (IJ). The October elections cycle had long included Rep positions; however the introduction of CSP positions was new. With both IJ and NC having not participated in an October elections cycle before, this posed a challenge of ensuring the staff team had the knowledge and experience to undertake the relevant pre-elections preparation and communication. On the whole this was successful, however with some societies (such as ICSMSU Neurology), difficulties in communication meant that they had already held elections and spoken to ICSMSU.

- 2.1.1. The process of communicating with participating CSPs and Constituent Unions should be clarified in future and incorporated into Student Activities workplans at an earlier stage.

- 2.2. Further to this some of the preparation on the part of the Education & Welfare team included contacting departments with information about the elections and the rep roles. This included introducing the role of PG departmental representatives.
 - 2.2.1. The process of understanding each department's expected set of Academic Representatives takes up significant time and resources. In future, this should be begun earlier in the summer.
- 2.3. In the initial meeting, Sky Yarlett (SY) and James Lindsay (JL) both showed interest in the role of Deputy Returning Officer (DRO), as it was expected that the coordinator-level staff in the elections team would take on the bulk of the administrative tasks. However, JL became unavailable and adequate alternative resource was not identified by Andrew Keenan (AK) until later in the election process; SY took up the role alone.
- 2.4. There was no formal handover of the DRO role, possibly a reflection of the fact that only three individuals had performed the DRO role for at least the previous four years – none of whom were available to perform it again. No role description was made available for the Deputy Returning Officer role.
- 2.5. The Governance Committee appointed Alex Mckee (AM) as the Returning Officer (RO); however AM and SY were not supported in meeting to discuss their responsibilities and duties.
 - 2.5.1. Support for the Deputy Returning Officers should be improved, with a role description written and training given.
- 2.6. The branding and messaging for the elections was decided on relatively short notice, which posed challenges for the elections team at a busy time of year.
 - 2.6.1. Marketing plans should be confirmed by the HSVC at an earlier stage.
- 2.7. In the elections review meeting after the elections cycle was completed, attendees made it clear that the staff involved in the process wanted more regular meetings after the initial meeting, or more updates. Candidate support – including monitoring campaign content for inappropriate content – should be factored into planning at an earlier stage, as it took up an unexpected amount of staff time.

3. During the elections – First technical issue

- 3.1. Voting opened at noon on Monday 17 October. At approximately 8am on Tuesday 18 October, the elections team were made aware by a student that some voters had been able to cast multiple votes. After swift investigation, the following cause was identified:
 - 3.1.1. A refresh of the electoral rolls, which was intended to conclude before the start of voting, had failed to complete before voting opened at noon. This meant that some positions had their electoral rolls refreshed after votes had been cast, resetting the 'voted' status of voters – which enabled them to cast a second vote.

- 3.1.2. This occurred due to the electoral refresh being started later than intended, which in turn happened due to late completion of the refresh of student enrolment data from the most recent OSS feed from College Registry.
 - 3.1.3. It was not possible to ascertain exactly when the refresh process had completed, or which positions had refreshed after midday (and were therefore potentially open to multiple voting). A cautious estimate (based on timings associated with the emptying of electoral rolls for positions with no candidates) was 12:40, although it is likely that the refresh process finished considerably earlier.
 - 3.1.4. It was consequently decided that all positions with votes cast between noon and 12:40 were potentially affected. 381 votes across 73 positions, affecting 204 candidates, had been cast, meaning that up to 381 'second votes' could potentially be cast by voters for these positions if the voting process were to continued uninterrupted.
 - 3.1.5. After consultation with the Returning Officer, it was decided that the potential effect on the results was too great and that doubt would be cast on the democratic nature and reliability of the election process – a risk to our values and reputation.
- 3.2. The RO and DRO agreed to suspend voting for the affected positions, and to re-run the elections for these positions again from the following Monday. The risk of decreased turnout and reputational damage was balanced against the need for a fair and reliable election process.
 - 3.3. The HSVC sent an email to all members of Imperial College Union, informing them of the incident and the decision of the RO. All candidates in the election were also emailed by the DRO.
 - 3.4. On Tuesday evening, the decision was challenged by a Constituent Union and Rep Network leader, citing the effect it would have on staff-student committees, turnout and candidate wellbeing. The challenge was take into account but the decision of the RO was not changed.
 - 3.5. While this incident occurred due to human error and the variable speed of a software process, it revealed that controls for this risk were not effective.

4. Elections re-run and second technical issue

- 4.1. The RO and elections team agreed that the re-run of the affected positions would take place one week after the original timetable – from 24 to 28 October.
- 4.2. Creating a new election as a partial 'clone' of another (transferring positions, voter rolls and candidates) is not a regular occurrence, and as such no established method for doing so already existed. The process was mapped out and initiated by the Systems team.
- 4.3. Within twenty minutes of the voting period beginning, it was discovered that candidates for positions requiring a seconder were not being shown to voters, and the candidates were sent notifications that they were withdrawn.
- 4.4. This behaviour was caused by a legacy feature of the voting booth which checks candidates to ensure they have the required number of seconders; if they don't, the system automatically withdraws them when the first voter begins to cast their vote for the affected position.

- 4.5. Under normal circumstances, the nominations process ensures that candidates always fulfil the requirement for seconders; however, the manual election creation process failed to account for seconders.
- 4.6. 38 positions were marked as requiring a seconder, although not all positions had received a voter by the time the issue was flagged. The seconder requirement was quickly rectified by the WD to prevent the problem spreading.
- 4.7. Cross-referencing from the previous week, 33 candidates across 17 positions were shown to be affected.
- 4.8. The WD and DRO swiftly reinstated the candidates and reset voting for these positions, contacting the small number of students who had cast their vote to ask them to do so again. This way, the risk of double-voting was reduced to zero, which was not possible for the first technical issue.

5. Other issues

- 5.1. Some CSPs with positions in AE16 had already filled those positions during the summer, but had not updated eActivities or responded to communications.
- 5.2. Difficulty in accessing CSP and CU constitutions complicated the task of understanding which positions existed on committees.
- 5.3. Some positions remained vacant after AE16, with a lack of clear responsibility about which team would take responsibility for filling them from that point onwards.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1. The Governance Committee approve the following recommendations and timeframes:
 - 6.1.1. A 'working practice' document that sets out how an election process should be managed and governed to be written in advance of LE17 (HSVC).
 - 6.1.2. Role descriptions for Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officer to be written in advance of LE17 (HSVC).
 - 6.1.3. At least two Deputy Returning Officers be appointed for LE17 and future elections (HSVC).
 - 6.1.4. The operation of eVoting and other systems resources required by elections to be reviewed and documented by the Systems team to reduce the risk of technical failures, in advance of LE17 (HSVC, Systems Manager).
 - 6.1.5. Responsibilities of managers (Education & Welfare, Student Activities, Marketing & Communications) to be clarified in advance of LE17 (HSVC).
 - 6.1.6. Review how CSP participation is communicated and managed in advance of LE17 (Student Activities Manager).
 - 6.1.7. Engage Departmental Administrators at earlier stage to understand how the work of populating the Academic Representation Network is to be distributed, in advance of AE17 (Education & Welfare Manager).
 - 6.1.8. Election delivery meetings to be held more regularly and with clearer outcomes for all future elections (HSVC).

Thank you to Sky Yarlett for their work in writing the majority of this paper.