

## **Appointment of Returning Officer**

**Andrew Keenan – Head of Student Voice & Communications**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The Governance Committee is required to appoint a Returning Officer for the upcoming October Elections.

### **2. Role of a Returning Officer**

- 2.1. Clause F2 of the bye-laws state that “the Governance Committee will, at least once per academic year, appoint an appropriately qualified person to act as the Returning Officer, who may not be a current Member of the Union and whose appointment must be ratified by the Trustee Board”
- 2.2. The Returning Officer’s duties relating to a ‘Major Election’ (an election including at least one position elected by cross-campus ballot) are set out in clause F3, and the responsibilities of the Governance Committee are set out in clause F4.
- 2.3. The responsibilities include appointing Deputy Returning Officers, setting the regulations of the election, and acting as final interpreter of the relevant bye-laws and policies.
- 2.4. The practice of having an external Returning Officer was introduced in 2012. This was to bring Imperial College Union in line with best practice in the students’ union sector of having an impartial person involved in judging electoral disputes, rather than local staff or student officers who could be perceived as biased. Previously, the Deputy President (Finance & Services) had acted as Returning Officer while also managing the elections day-to-day, relying on staff support for decisions on appeals and complaints.

### **3. Practice in recent years**

- 3.1. The appointment and use of Returning Officers in recent years has been successful. In practice, and in line with the bye-laws, the day-to-day management of an elections has been led by the Deputy Returning Officer(s), drawn from staff, with very few complaints having reached the Returning Officer.
- 3.2. In recent years, the Returning Officers for the October and June Elections have been drawn from College staff, such as Jessica Silver (Legal Services Officer) and Jon Ashton (former Student Marketing and Communications Manager).
- 3.3. The Returning Officer for the March Elections for four of the past five years has been Jim Dickinson, CEO of UEASU, in a reciprocal arrangement with Joe Cooper, our Managing Director at the time. This changed in March 2016 when Jim Dickinson withdrew as Returning Officer during the election cycle and was replaced by Jon Ashton.
- 3.4. The Returning Officer for the 2017 March Elections was Pari Dhillon, former Chief Executive of LSESU. Since then, Pari has been contracted by ICU for a piece of consultancy work and

therefore may no longer be suited to take on this independent and voluntary role.

#### **4. Recommendation**

- 4.1. Ian Dancy has agreed in principle to be Returning Officer for the October Elections. Ian is the Chief Executive at Students' Union UCL and has worked in several students' unions.
- 4.2. Given his knowledge of students' union electoral processes and lack of personal knowledge of students likely to be running for positions in the October Elections, I recommend that the Governance Committee appoint Ian Dancy as our Returning Officer, and that this be ratified by the Trustee Board via email.
- 4.3. This appointment should be reviewed by mid-December at the latest when the Governance Committee discusses the appropriate Returning Officer for the March Elections 2018, where they may seek to arrange a reciprocal arrangement in the longer term with Students' Union UCL or another students' union.