

# Union Stance on Student Voting in National and International Elections

**Proposer:** Ansh Bhatnagar (FoNS UG OM)

**Seconders:** Alex Chippy Compton (Union President), Abhijay Sood (RCSU AAO), Michael Edwards (RCSU President), Lloyd James (FoNS PG Student)

No specific examples of UK Government policies affecting students are given in this paper such that it is as non-partisan as possible. This is an update to an existing policy with the same name, temporarily renewed by Union Council on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017 and expiring on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

## Union Notes:

1. The UK Local Council Elections, including those for Greater London, fall on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2018.
2. All UK students living away from their home address are eligible to vote at both their home and term-time addresses.
3. British, Commonwealth, and EU students are all eligible to vote in these elections.
4. According to the Electoral Commission, the overall turnout for the 2014 Local Council Elections was 35.7% [1], compared to the 2017 General Election turnout of 69.0% [2].
5. Local Council Elections suffer from much lower turnout than General Elections.
6. Historically, youth turnout in elections has been much lower than that of older citizens, with 54% of 18-24 year olds voting in GE 2017 compared to 71% of 55+ year olds [3].
7. However, recently there has been a surge in youth turnout. In GE 2015 turnout among 18-24 year olds was only 38%, and in the 2016 EU referendum this went up to 53% [3].
8. Many people register to vote very late, leading to a situation where more than 26,000 people attempted to register for EU 2016 six minutes before the midnight deadline, causing the website to crash and become inaccessible [4].
9. Local councils have the authority to make significant local decisions.
10. The Union has committed "to empower students to be proactive, responsible citizens who have the capacity to change the world" as an objective under 'For Your Voice' in the 2017-2020 Strategy [5].

## Union Believes:

1. That the Union has a duty to promote democracy both on and off campus, as it prides itself on being "the most democratic and engaged student body in the United Kingdom" [6].
2. That many EU and Commonwealth students are unaware that they can vote in these elections.
3. That many British students are unaware they can vote at both their home and term-time addresses.
4. That the Union should promote the above two points so that the student body is well aware of their right to vote.
5. That the voices of students' unions sometimes carry less weight on national issues because of the perceived lack of interest from students and younger people in politics.
6. That many decisions regarding the future of the Union's members are widely accepted as being taken without due consultation of students. This is evidenced by the fact that there is only one student on the newly appointed Office for Students Board [7].
7. That the Union should encourage students to vote in order to ensure adequate representation of the student body at a local, national and international level.

8. That not being a member of the NUS allows us to encourage students to vote without any suggestion of political bias.

#### **Union Resolves:**

1. To mandate the Union President to work with College to implement a voter registration tab as part of the fresher registration and returning student re-registration on the Student e-Service (see Appendix I).
2. To mandate the Officer Trustee team to oversee a non-partisan student-led campaign, encouraging students to vote in the run up to the 2018 Local Elections.
3. To host stalls in Sheffield/Beit Quad in the run up to the 2018 Local Elections with informative material regarding voter eligibility (focusing on EU, Commonwealth, and British student voting at both home and term-time addresses), and voter registration forms.
4. To ensure this policy is included in the Sabbatical handover, to ensure subsequent Officers are informed of this stance, and that similar campaigns are repeated for future UK elections and referenda.
5. To replace the existing policy of the same name (temporarily renewed 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017) with this policy.

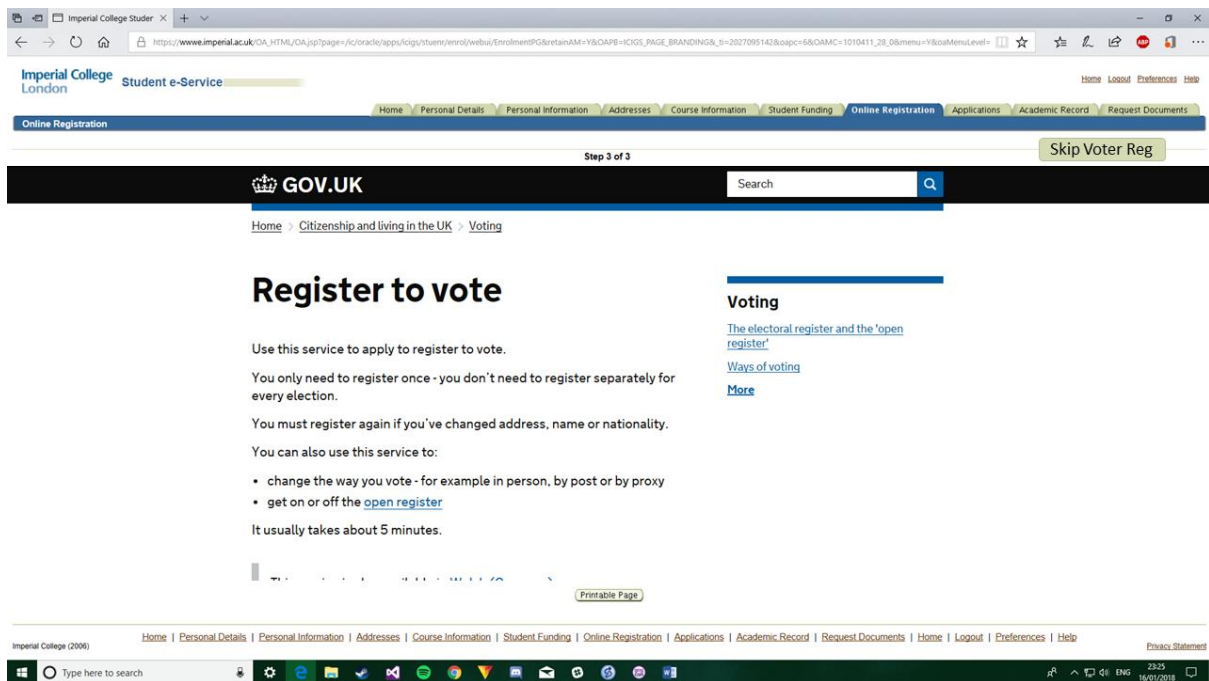
#### **References:**

- [1] Electoral Commission (2014) "Local Elections in England May 2014" Available at: [https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/175062/Local-elections-2014-Electoral-data-report.pdf](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/175062/Local-elections-2014-Electoral-data-report.pdf)
- [2] Electoral Commission (2017) "Voting in 2017" Available at: [https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/234893/Voting-in-2017-Final.pdf](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/234893/Voting-in-2017-Final.pdf)
- [3] Ipsos MORI (2017) "How the voters voted in the 2017 election" Available at: [https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/2017-06/how-britain-voted-in-the-2017-election\\_2.pdf](https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/2017-06/how-britain-voted-in-the-2017-election_2.pdf)
- [4] The Guardian (2016) "EU referendum voter registration site crashes before deadline" Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/07/eu-referendum-voter-registration-site-crashes-before-deadline>
- [5] Imperial College Union (2017) "For Your Voice" Available at: <https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/about-us/our-strategy-2017-20/your-voice>
- [6] Imperial College Union (2017) "Your Union" Available at: <https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union>
- [7] UK Government (2018) "New universities regulator comes into force" Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-universities-regulator-comes-into-force>

## Appendix I – Voter Registration Tab/Pop-up

The voter registration tab will be a portal to the official ‘Register to Vote’ webpage on the UK Government website. It would appear in a tab (a webpage inside a webpage) on the Student e-Service. All Imperial will be doing is making it very convenient for people to register to vote in their new halls/private accommodation. As the student enters their information directly into the Government webpage in order to register to vote, Imperial will not be handling their data at any point in the voter registration process.

Below I have created a mockup of what the end result may look like...



If the user does not wish to register to vote, they can simply click ‘Skip Voter Registration’ to proceed with their Imperial registration.

Alternatively, instead of a tab, this could be implemented as a pop-up linking to the voter registration website.