Elections Committee:

- Alex Roberts (CUSU Returning Officer/GU Deputy Returning Officer)
- Aisha Sobey (GU Returning Officer/CUSU Deputy Returning Officer)
- Edward Parker Humphreys (Communications Officer)
- Emily Barker-Gibbs
- Joe Foye
- Christy McMorrow (non-voting staff member, EC secretary).

Elections Committee Constitution & Operation:

Prior to the election period, due to resignations from the committee after the Michaelmas elections, it was decided that two new members should be appointed, along with the addition of Edward Parker Humphreys, the CUSU President, who had recused himself in the Michaelmas period. This was enacted, and the EC welcomed Emily Barker-Gibbs and Joe Foye to the EC. A significant change from previous years was that complaints and queries to the Elections Committee would not be immediately received by all members of the committee, but would instead be received by Christy McMorrow, as the CUSU staff member responsible for supporting the committee, who would then compile a daily agenda. This limited EC discussions, except in emergency circumstances, to once a day. This was successful in reducing the intensity of EC’s workload from previous years, although the committee nonetheless committed significant time to the work. This change was implemented as a result of recommendations of the previous year’s committee.

The EC made the decision to meet at the same point every day during campaigning to discuss complaints and make decisions. It was decided several weeks in advance that meetings would be at 1pm, allowing committee members to plan appropriately.

This was the final major election run under the purview of the CUSU Elections Committee, and future elections will be governed by the Cambridge SU Democracy Committee, which will also be responsible for overseeing other aspects of the good governance of the Students’ Union. This new committee will from this point onwards be made up of the Returning Officer, the Chair of Union Council, the Chair of the Executive Committee (which will be one of the Union Presidents), and two other students appointed by the Union Council.

Candidate Recruitment:

In total there were 19 candidates in these elections, which represented an increase from the 17 candidates running for CUSU/GU sabbatical roles and the University Councillor role last year. However, there was one more sabbatical role available than in the 2019 Lent elections. While all roles were contested in 2019, this was not the case this year, with only one candidate running for the roles of Access, Education and Participation (UG) Officer, Access, Education and Participation (PG) Officer, BME Officer, Disabled Students’ Officer, and Welfare & Community Officer. This is something we will seek to prevent in future years.

However, for two of the roles (President (UG) and Women’s Officer) there was a much higher number of candidates than in any of the last 5 years, with 5 candidates running for each position. The highly-competitive nature of the Women’s Officer election is particularly noteworthy, as the 2019 election was the first time since 2016 that as many as 2 candidates had contested for the role.
This result is evidence of the importance of consistent and encouraging promotion of the positives of running in elections, as well as promoting the role itself. The Elections Committee notes the admirable level of work put in by CUSU Women’s Officer Kate Litman in encouraging candidates to run for the role. Moving forward is clear that efforts of this kind should be continued to ensure that future elections are contested where possible.

Voter Turnout:

Voter turnout for the CUSU elections this year was 20.9%, slightly down on last year’s 22.2%. This was largely due to the significant increase in the electorate due to the inclusion of non-matriculated part-time students in the membership for Cambridge SU. These voters turned out in very low numbers, and will be a target group for the future.

A new record for the number of votes cast in a central SU election was achieved for the second year in a row, with the 2020 total of 5,144 narrowly surpassing the 2019 total of 5,120. Postgraduate turnout (926 votes), while higher than in last year’s CUSU election, was lower than in the previous year’s GU election (1,125 votes). This disparity is a key challenge for the new SU, and work to amend this will be prioritised, to ensure faith in the new Union is high amongst Postgraduate members.

Election Rules:

Complaints within this election were relatively low in comparison to previous years, however some issues did emerge in the elections that were of particular concern. In particular, EC had to escalate to the Trustee Board an issue involving a sabbatical officer being understood to have helped campaign against a candidate in the elections. This issue reiterates the need for Cambridge SU sabbatical officers to clearly understand the prohibition on campaigning for candidates other than themselves in elections to Union positions. EC recommends that this is made as explicit as possible to the incoming team.

The only major amendment to the CUSU election rules was to permit candidates to post in “closed” social media groups and chats. This was a long-standing CUSU rule, but one that EC believed to be difficult to enforce, and encouraged candidates to spend time raising complaints against infringements on this rule, rather than focusing on winning over voters. This alteration significantly reduced the number of complaints raised by candidates during the elections and overall led to a less “litigious” elections period.

Beyond this, there was little change to the rules of the election or their enforcement. Only one candidate received a punishment beyond a warning; a one-day campaign ban that was issued to Jess O’Brien for sharing resources with another campaign.

Campaigning:

CUSU and the GU are incredibly thankful to the efforts put into the election by candidates and acknowledge that the high voter turnouts in recent years are largely due to their energies. With candidates again opting to avoid lecture sites due to ongoing UCU industrial action, as had been the case in 2018, candidates had to rely on their initiative in designing campaign strategies that found alternate ways of reaching students.

Less time was spent on preparing candidates for the requirements of running for election than in 2019, with only one event being run for those considering running for election. An increase in these events should be considered in order to maximise candidate confidence and voter outreach.
The winners of the elections were as follows:
President (UG): Ben Margolis
President (PG): Aastha Dahal
Access, Education & Participation Officer (UG): Esme Cavendish
Access, Education & Participation Officer (PG): Siyang Wei
BME Officer: Howard Chae
Disabled Students’ Officer: Kerensa Gaunt
Welfare & Community Officer: Alice Gilderdale
University Councillor: Freddie Poser