



University of Cambridge Graduate Union

Returning Officer's Report on the GU President By-Election 2015

Introduction

This report is a summary of the 2015 GU President By-Election, produced for GU Council and the Council Committee for the Supervision of Students' Unions.

This report includes a breakdown of the Elections period and results, some observations on process and recommendations from the Elections Committee and Returning Officer.

The Elections Committee would like to take the opportunity to give particular thanks to:

- Rob Richardson (Graduate Union Manager) for all his support and hard work over the election period
- Katharina Greve, who was a student volunteer offering considerable time and dedication to communicate alongside her studies during the elections period
- The candidates and their interest and dedication in running for the role of GU President
- The Proctors' Office, Student Registry, and CCSSU in their ongoing support in relation to elections process

Jemma Stewart

Graduate Union President By-Election Returning Officer 2015, CUSU Coordinator 2015-16

The Elections Committee Membership

The Elections Committee normally comprises, in accordance with Schedule E.8 to the GU Constitution, the GU President, two members of GU Council, the CUSU Coordinator and one member of the GU trustees- unless otherwise determined by the Council. The GU President would normally act as Returning Officer (Schedule E.9). In the absence of a Graduate Union President, the CUSU/GU Welfare and Rights Officer and acting GU President, Poppy Ellis Logan, served as a member of Elections Committee. Katharina Greve was also elected to Elections Committee through GU Council on 12 October 2015. CUSU Coordinator Jemma Stewart was chosen as Returning Officer due to previous experiences of elections, having served on the CUSU Elections Committee in 2014 and since partaken in two CUSU elections.

Committee Membership:

Jemma Stewart	GU Returning Officer, CUSU Coordinator
Poppy Ellis Logan	CUSU/GU Welfare and Rights Officer, Acting GU President
Katharina Greve	Newnham College

A committee consisting of only three members was stretched, and would have been even more so had the election not been a by-election (with the annual Lent term elections generally proving significantly more high-profile). We would recommend that positions on the Elections Committee are advertised well in advance of any elections at the beginning of Michaelmas Term, to have an Elections Committee filled in case of need of election throughout the year, and to serve as members for the Lent Term Elections.

We would also recommend the clear delineation of workload to ensure that committee members are used to equal capacities.

By-Election Timeline 2015

Position for Election

The role of GU President was vacant owing to the winning candidate at the Lent Term election opting not to take up the position, and therefore resigning office. In line with Schedule E.16, as an irregular sabbatical officer vacancy, a by-election was run in order to elect a President.

Eligible to stand for the position were Members of the Graduate Union, in line with clause 18.1 of the GU constitution: "student who is formally matriculated and registered for an approved graduate or postgraduate programme provided by the University".

Students meeting the same criteria were eligible to vote, providing they met the criteria as of the date on which the electoral roll was generated- 23 October 2015. Following advice from the Proctors' Office, this statement was explicitly included in the published rules, with the relevant extract from the GU constitution appended.

Voting System

Elections took place by Single Transferable Vote as per Electoral Reform Society rules, and were run as a solely online vote, using CUSU's online voting portal (<https://www.vote.cusu.cam.ac.uk>)- Schedule E.6 makes provision for a by-election to be run solely online, unless Council determines otherwise.

The election was validated using the Opavote system software (<https://www.opavote.com/>).

The Rules – Significant Changes

Following recommendations from the 2015 CUSU/GU Lent Elections and advice from the Proctors' Office and CCSSU, the following alterations were made to the rules and to procedure. The GU Elections Committee remains especially grateful to the above for the time invested and support offered prior to this election.

Clarification of the count and the declaration of a result

The interpretation of whether or not the initial announcement of results following the closing of voting constituted a final declaration during the Lent elections caused several issues. For this election, the rules were clarified so that the initial results and final results were clearly separated, and candidates were made aware of this.

The rules stated, "An announcement of preliminary results will be made following the closing of the ballot and the counting of the votes. Validation processes will then take place, and full results will be confirmed when the winner of the election is declared the following day."

As this election was online only and did not feature a paper vote, the CUSU voting platform issues a count automatically as soon as voting closes. This formed the preliminary announcement, with separate software being used the following day to check the count and validate the result.

Clarity over the complaints/appeals process

The Lent term election was the subject of numerous complaints and appeals. For this election, the complaints process was clarified so that complaints must have been received within 72 hours of the occurrence of the incident in question, and similarly, any appeal of a decision of the Elections Committee must be received within 72 hours of that decision being communicated.

The rules were also updated so that any complaints or appeals relating to the result must have been received within 72 hours of the final announcement of the result. This was to counter the possibility of complaints preventing a final result from being announced and a seemingly unending election unfolding. However, this raises a question as to the status of the final result- under these rules, there is a 72 hour period within which the 'final' result can be queried. Future Elections Committees may wish to consider ruling that complaints relating to the result must be received within 12 hours of the initial announcement- this provides candidates with the opportunity to appeal, but should not prevent an announcement following validation the next day, unless in extreme circumstances.

A clause was also introduced to allow the Elections Committee to sanction candidates for vexatious or frivolous complaints, on the recommendation of the Lent 2015 Returning Officer.

Demarcation of CUSU/GU ECs

Schedule E.6 to the GU Constitution allows the GU to delegate the running of the GU President election to the CUSU Elections Committee- this has been the usual practice in recent years. In Lent 2015, this process was the subject of complaints, and the Proctors' Office advised that clearer boundaries should be drawn between the committees, and greater clarity as to their mutual rules communicated to candidates. As the Presidential by-election was for a GU position only, the Elections Committee was a GU committee, and these issues were avoided. Attention will be drawn to this point before the Lent 2016 elections.

Clarity over reporting to GU Council

It had been contested that the GU's constitution had not been followed in Lent 2015 in relation to the reporting of election rules to Council. For this election, process was closely followed, diligent minutes were taken, and these were published online and circulated to Council members for transparency.

Electoral roll

Significant issues arose surrounding the electoral roll during the previous GU election. Miscommunication between the CUSU Elections Committee and the university resulted in misunderstandings over the coding used in the datasets, and this led to approximately 1,800 graduate students (including clinical students, LLMs, PGCEs) being missed off the roll for the Lent 2015 GU President election. While the mistake was swiftly corrected, it necessitated the correction of a second ballot, and complaints were received regarding the impacts of this. There were also complaints regarding the fact that Lent-starters were not included on the rolls.

Much work was undertaken by the Students' Unions, the Proctors' Office and the Student Registry following these issues, and new systems for producing rolls were developed. CUSU and the GU remain grateful to the Student Registry for their accommodating approach and help during the past few months- and production and use of the electoral rolls for the by-election appear to have been smooth. Clarity regarding the status of the rolls was added to the election rules, including the exact cut-off date at which students not registered would not be added to the roll, and the relevant section of the GU's constitution stating eligibility to vote and stand in the election.

Voter Eligibility and Online Ballot

Those eligible to vote in the 2015 GU President By-Election were students formally matriculated and registered for an approved graduate or postgraduate programme provided by the University, in line with clause 18.1 of the GU constitution.

Following recommendations from the 2015 CUSU/GU Lent Elections, the ballot was created several days before the opening of the vote, and was advertised to those eligible to vote as being open for inspection. Students who wished to check whether they were on the roll could do so by visiting the

online platform, which contained details of how to proceed if the student appeared not to be on the roll but felt they should be.

No contact was made during this time or during the vote itself to suggest that anyone was missing from the ballot. Had approaches been received, the returning officer would have had the ability to manually check the electoral roll and, using information provided by the student, judge whether they should be added to it.

Candidates

The GU President By-Election was contested by two candidates. A third nomination was also received before the close of the nomination period- however, this candidate subsequently withdrew their nomination before campaigning period and was therefore not included in the ballot.

The Elections Committee was delighted to receive multiple candidacies. By-elections, in particular, have historically proven difficult to generate publicity around, and the time of year meant a full-time position beginning in November (immediately after the by-election) would have appealed to fewer students than a position starting in July (with an associated 3 or 4 months' notice to plan).

The Elections Committee recommends a continued publicity of the opportunity to run for election so that we maintain levels of interest in running for the role of GU President in the main set of elections.

Publicity and Campaigns

Our publicity included:

- A comprehensive webpage and continually updated Facebook news
- A GU By-Election Facebook Event for each candidate
- Emails to every graduate student from the GU in three occasions, and further publicity within the CUSU bulletin (sent to all students)

The individual candidates were also encouraged to publicise the election and their candidacies as widely as possible and were offered tips in the Candidate's Briefing session provided.

Elections Committee held one hustings event featuring a two minute speech from each candidate alongside a question and answer session. The event was not well attended, however video recordings were made and put online following the event.

Complaints and Disqualification

Elections Committee received no complaints during the GU President By-Election. One instance arose of an individual posting in a College Facebook Group endorsing a vote to Re-Open Nominations, however this was later removed following requests from Elections Committee and

candidates were kept informed throughout as to the actions being taken by Elections Committee. A further incident of one candidate referring to the other was noted by Elections Committee, though this was dealt with swiftly and as the candidate apologised to Elections Committee and removed the Facebook Post, no further action was deemed necessary.

Results

314 valid votes were cast in the election. In the first round of voting, Chad Allen's total number of votes exceeded the quota (157) for successful election, and he was therefore duly elected as Graduate Union President.

	Round One
Chad Allen	218
Richard Jones	70
Re-open nominations	26
Non-transferrable	0
Total	314
Quote required for successful election	157

While we would aim for as high a turnout as possible, the turnout here was in line with that witnessed at the GU's most recent previous by-election (Easter 2014). Given that this by-election was run at an unusual time of year, without a full-time GU President to promote it, and separate to a main elections period (which has significantly greater reach), turnout was broadly as expected.

Summary of Recommendations

Devote greater time and resources to promoting the Elections Committee positions, and recruiting people to those positions. Similarly, workload and planning among members (who are often volunteers) needs to be well managed.

An election cannot run without an Elections Committee, and Council involvement in this is fundamental. It is important to be able to assemble an effective Elections Committee, particularly for by-elections, as they can theoretically occur at any time.

Consider the complaints process as it relates to the final result

Future Elections Committees may wish to develop a clear policy relating to appeals of the result, so that a final result is beyond dispute. It may be that complaints must be made within a short period following the initial announcement of results.

Clarify the operation of CUSU and GU Elections Committees

As this election was run by a GU committee previous issues regarding the delineation between CUSU and the GU did not recur. However, in future, it will be necessary to clarify exactly what the mutual roles of the Elections Committees are.

Sustain publicity regarding sabbatical officer vacancies

The last few months have demonstrated the difficulties that arise from a vacant sabbatical office. Therefore, CUSU and the GU may wish to remain aware of this, and should seek to publicise the roles and generate interest throughout the year. This is particularly the case for the GU, as an election for President will occur again only 3 months after the previous one.