



## **Graduate Union Michaelmas Term 2016 Elections Returning Officer's Report**

### **1. Introduction**

This report covers the elections held by the Graduate Union in Michaelmas Term 2016 for the 2017 Part-Time Officers and the sabbatical Vice-President.

The sabbatical office of Vice-President was established by the GU Council, with the approval of the Board of Trustees and CCSSU, on 22 September 2016.

### **2. Elections Committee**

The election was undertaken by the GU Elections Committee, which was convened and its members appointed by the GU Council on 22 September.

The Elections Committee comprised:

- Chad Allen, *K* (President and Returning Officer)
- Amatey Doku *JE*
- Mark Driver, *R*
- Fatima Baldo, *MUR*

### **3. Timing**

Although the offices of the Part-Time Officers are established by the GU's Constitution and Schedules, the timing of their election is not set. However, given that (a) the roles are to be taken up by current students, and (b) many graduate courses last only one academic year, it makes sense that the elections be held early in Michaelmas Term to enable all graduates to participate in the activities of the union.

The office of Vice-President was established *inter alia* to improve continuity within the GU and to coordinate the activities of the Part-Time Officers. The Vice-President was intended to be elected at a 6-month offset to the President, and as such to take office in January.

The GU Council therefore agreed to hold the elections concurrently and early in Michaelmas Term – and for the Part-Time Officers to formally take office in January alongside the Vice-President.

The election schedule, as agreed by the GU Council, was therefore:

- Nominations open: 00:01 Tuesday, 4 October
- Nominations close: 23:59 on Sunday, 9 October
- Online voting opens: 00:01 on Sunday 16 October
- Online voting closes (and provisional results declared): 23:59 on Monday 17 October
- Full results confirmed and published: 17:00 on Tuesday 18 October

These timings appear to have been successful. Having nominations open during Freshers' Week seems to have been a successful means of attracting candidates, and affording the incoming Vice-President and Part-Time Officers over half a term for induction and planning has also been well-received.

#### **4. Electoral Roll and Eligibility**

##### **(a) Vice-President**

Those eligible to stand for the office of Vice-President, and to vote in the election for the role, were all students who were formally matriculated and registered for an approved graduate or postgraduate programme provided by the University of Cambridge (excluding any who had opted-out of membership of the GU). Any candidate for the role of Vice-President who intended to intermit to take office had to have the prior permission of their supervisor and/or faculty etc.

The electoral roll for the election was collected without difficulty from the Student Registry. It is worth noting that, through precedent, clinical medicine students are deemed to be postgraduate students though they are classed as “undergraduate other” within CamSIS. There was an advertised inspection window lasting several days, during which the roll was available online and students were free to query it.

As there had never been an election for a students' union sabbatical officer held so soon after the end of the academic year, a novel query encountered was over the eligibility of MPhil students following the submission of their thesis (but before graduation). The Student Registry confirmed that the University did not deem such individuals to be students – and as our definition of students depends on the University's determination, they were therefore not eligible to participate in the election.

Given that there is a subtle distinction between PhD students (who may participate following the submission of their thesis, so long as they have not completed a viva) and MPhil students, it is important that eligibility is better defined and advertised in advance for future sabbatical elections held at a similar time of year.

**(b) Part-Time Officers**

Those eligible to stand for the Part-Time Officer roles, and to vote in the election for the roles, were:

- students who were formally matriculated and registered for an approved graduate or postgraduate programme provided by the University of Cambridge,
- undergraduate students of the University in their fourth-or-higher year of residence,
- student who were members of one of the institutions belonging to the Cambridge Theological Federation,
- post-doctoral researchers working within the University who were members of the University, or
- spouses and civil partners of any of the above,

excluding anyone who had opted-out of membership of the GU.

The above eligibility definition poses several problems:

Firstly, the Student Registry is not able to simply extract a list of fourth-year students from their database. Retrieving this data required a lengthy and involved email exchange between the GU and the Student Registry, involving the Returning Officer suggesting specific logical queries to run without sight of the structure of the database. Because the roll data was requested sufficiently far in advance of the ballot, this did not cause any major problems. It is recommended that future requests for electoral roll data are similarly explicit.

Secondly, we do not have access to a list of post-doctoral researchers eligible to vote in our elections. We therefore require any post-doctoral researcher who wishes to vote to have manually checked the register and applied to have their name added. In practice, they are excluded.

Finally, we do not have a list of spouses and civil partners of members, and, even if we did, few of them would have the Raven credentials necessary to use the online voting platform. Again, in practice, these potential voters are excluded.

It is intended that post-doctoral researchers and spouses and civil partners of members will be removed from the GU's electorate in the forthcoming constitutional review, and therefore no further action need be taken to address these problems.

The roll as compiled was made available for inspection for several days in the week preceding the election, and members were invited to inspect and query it.

**5. Candidates**

At the close of nominations, there were two candidates for the office of Vice-President and 16 candidates across the eight Part-Time Officer positions. There were nominations for every role except for that of Families Officer.

When the ballot opened, because of a number of withdrawn nominations, there was only one candidate for Vice-President and twelve candidates across the Part-Time Officer

positions. The candidate drop-out rate is clearly higher than desirable, but it is common in student elections for candidates to be adverse to participating in contested elections.

## **6. Campaigning Rules**

The election rules were approved by the Elections Committee on 30 September and promulgated via the GU website on 1 October. These rules are attached as an annex.

The rules were adapted from those used for previous GU elections. Substantive changes included:

- Referring to rival candidates without them present was no longer prohibited – so long as any remarks were a legitimate and proportionate response to their manifesto.
- The requirements for candidates to register their campaigners was removed.
- Rather than holding a hustings event, candidates for the office of Vice-President were filmed responding to hustings questions and these responses uploaded to the website; Part-Time Officer candidates were afforded the opportunity to publish written responses to questions on the website.

No difficulties were encountered as a consequence of these rule changes.

## **7. Complaints and sanctions**

No complaints were received, and no sanctions applied.

## **8. Voting system**

The elections were held under the Single Transferable Vote rules, as defined by the Electoral Reform Society (aka “ERS97” rules), as implemented by the CUSU online voting portal.

## **9. Results**

There were 222 votes cast in the Vice-President election, and 434 votes cast in the Part-Time Officer elections.

The tabulated final vote tallies follow.

**(a) Vice-President**

	<u>First Count</u>	<u>Result</u>
Ellie Chan, <i>CTH</i>	190	<i>Elected</i>
Re-open nominations	30	
Exhausted	–	
Total	<u>220</u>	
<i>Active vote</i>	220	
<i>Quota</i>	110	

**(b) Academic Affairs Officer**

	<u>First Count</u>	<u>Result</u>
Nikta Daijavad, <i>G</i>	173	<i>Elected</i>
Julia Kenny, <i>N</i>	128	
Re-open nominations	17	
Exhausted	–	
Total	<u>318</u>	
<i>Active vote</i>	318	
<i>Quota</i>	159	

**(c) Environmental Officer**

	<u>First Count</u>	<u>Result</u>
Shanshan Wang, <i>JN</i>	260	<i>Elected</i>
Re-open nominations	26	
Exhausted	–	
Total	<u>286</u>	
<i>Active vote</i>	286	
<i>Quota</i>	143	

**(d) Events Officer**

	<u>First Count</u>	<u>First Transfer</u>	<u>Second Count</u>	<u>Result</u>
Brittney Shiny, <i>G</i>	146	+2	148	<i>Elected</i>
Kosta Zivanovic, <i>Q</i>	140	+3	143	
Re-open nominations	19	-19	–	
Exhausted	–	+14	14	
Total	<u>305</u>		<u>305</u>	
<i>Active vote</i>	305		291	
<i>Quota</i>	152.50		145.50	

**(e) International Officer**

	<u>First Count</u>	<u>Result</u>
Sophia D'Angelo, Q	228	<i>Elected</i>
Ajescha Prozell, ED	29	
Re-open nominations	18	
Exhausted	–	
Total	<u>275</u>	
Active vote	275	
Quota	137.50	

**(f) Mature Undergraduates Officer**

	<u>First Count</u>	<u>Result</u>
Amalie Høgfeldt, HH	239	<i>Elected</i>
Re-open nominations	22	
Exhausted	–	
Total	<u>261</u>	
Active vote	261	
Quota	130.50	

**(f) Welfare Officer**

	<u>First Count</u>	<u>Result</u>
Aila Bicer, CTH	249	<i>Elected</i>
Re-open nominations	27	
Exhausted	–	
Total	<u>261</u>	
Active vote	276	
Quota	138	

**(g) Women's Officer**

	<u>First Count</u>	<u>First Transfer</u>	<u>Second Count</u>	<u>Result</u>
Yassamin Ansari, JN	121	+15	136	<i>Elected</i>
Susanna O'Brien, EM	96	+21	117	
Paridhi Sharma, JN	66	-66	–	
Re-open nominations	14	-14	–	
Exhausted	–	+44	44	
Total	<u>297</u>		<u>297</u>	
Active vote	297		253	
Quota	148.50		126.5	

## **10. Summary of recommendations**

1. Maintain the scheduling of the Michaelmas elections such that nominations open soon after students arrive, with the aim of replicating the high number of nominations achieved this year.
2. Future sabbatical elections held early in Michaelmas Term should advertise eligibility more definitively, with respect to MPhil students having submitted their thesis.
3. When requesting fourth-year students' electoral roll data from the Student Registry, include a specific database query that is known to extract the required data.
4. Continue the current constitutional review, such that categories of people who cannot be reliably included on an electoral roll are removed from the GU's electorate.

*Chad Allen  
Returning Officer  
January 2017*