



**GRADUATE  
UNION**

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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# *Graduate Union Returning Officer Report*

Lent Term

Elections for the President (as well as the Welfare and Rights Officer)

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>
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## 1. Introduction

This report covers the Lent Term 2018 elections for the Graduate Union for the President and the joint Welfare and Rights Officer (WARO). Since the election for the joint WARO is run by CUSU, the GU President election was also delegated to them as per the directions of the GU council, decision dated 24<sup>th</sup> January 2018, following the Schedule E6 of GU constitution,

*“The conduct of the election may be delegated to CUSU, and will then be governed by CUSU electoral rules and procedures. The Graduate Union Returning Officer shall be a member of the CUSU Elections Committee for this purpose.”*

## 2. Elections Committee

For the duration of these elections, the Elections Committee therefore comprised the following members appointed by the CUSU Council plus the GU returning officer appointed by the GU Council:

- Darshana Joshi (GU Returning Officer and Deputy CUSU Returning Officer),
- Sam Longton (CUSU Returning Officer and Deputy GU Returning Officer),
- Daisy Eyre (Elections Committee Communications Officer),
- Guillermo Íñiguez,
- Alex Russell
- Christy McMorrow (Elections Committee Secretary- nonvoting).

This was the second set of elections, and first Lent elections, under which the Elections Committee contained the non-voting role of Elections Committee Secretary, undertaken by a staff member. The Committee continues to think this has been a successful change.

The presence of a staff member on the committee helped add familiarity with CUSU's Constitution and Standing Orders to the committee, increasing relevant advice available to the voting members on rules decisions. Moreover, this change ensured that there was greater communication and cooperation between the organisational and decision-making sides of election work. There was also the benefit of an additional full-time CUSU staff member with the ability to consistently respond to complaints or other emerging issues.



In Michaelmas the committee had only the absolute minimum number of members, with only one full-time student (and two sabbatical officers). It was recommended in the review of Michaelmas elections to seek two additional members, as well as a new Deputy Returning Officer to replace Ellie Chan at the end of her term of office. This was successful, with the addition of Alex Russell and Guillermo Íñiguez to the Committee, as well as GU President, Dr Darshana Joshi replacing Dr Ellie Chan.

Election Committee worked well as a team in general and all participants contributed to the discussions about rule breaches, with debate between members aiding the delivery of robust decision-making.

### 3. Electoral Roll and Eligibility

#### (a) President

Those eligible to stand for the office of 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 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.

#### (b) Welfare and Rights Officers

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

- Undergraduate students of the University in their third-or-higher year of residence, or all other Graduate student

All CUSU members (all matriculated students who had not opted out) were eligible to vote in this election.



## 4. Candidates

In total, there were 3 candidates for the GU President's position (compared to 2 in last year's Easter Term by-election). There were 2 candidates for the joint Welfare and Rights Office, and 8 candidates for CUSU sabbatical positions, up from 7 in the 2017 Lent elections. Moreover, while 5 of the positions had uncontested elections in 2017, this applied to only 3 of the positions this year. There were also 3 candidates for University Councillor, the same amount as in 2017. However, for the second consecutive year, there were no candidates recruited for the positions of Heads of Ethical Affairs Team.

The key recruitment methods for candidates can be identified as belonging to two strands of GU and CUSU work:

- Sabbatical officer contact with, and encouragement of, potential candidates
- Online communications about elections
- In the case of the Graduate Union increased visibility

The GU President election was contested, and all three candidates had contacted the GU in some way. Though no one specific encouragement worked better than others, we see that broad engagement backed up with specific contact helped this to be contested.

One obstacle to achieving contested election is the reluctance amongst engaged students to run against one another, even when they hold different priorities for the Union. There is no straightforward way to solve this problem, but both main routes for recruiting candidates can aid this. First, if more candidates not already engaged with current full-time officers were to run, contested elections would be more likely. These candidates are those we need to reach in particular through our central communications about elections. Second, incumbent sabbatical officers can help encourage engaged students to run in contested elections, emphasising the importance of contested elections in a democratic union, and encouraging debate between engaged members.

Emphasising the importance of contested elections to incoming sabbatical officers, and ensuring they encourage students active in the Union to consider running, should be prioritised, alongside maintaining and reviewing central communications on elections.



## 5. Campaigning Rules

There were limited complaints during CUSU elections campaigning; possibly as a result of a loosening of CUSU election rules in recent years. The only CUSU election that involved any significant level of controversy was the election for Access & Funding Officer, due to high tensions and accusations made after the election debates. Nonetheless, no formal punishments were handed out in this election. The Elections Committee worked to calm the tone of this election by working with both candidates and believe this was broadly successful.

However, some significant issues still remain that ought to be addressed before the 2018 Lent elections. In particular, issues that emerged in the GU President election highlighted poor communication of election rules to candidates, in particular, the fact that not all parts of the CUSU Standing Orders relating to elections were included in the rules document, though candidates were asked to sign that they had read these. Elections Committee should make sure that this is remedied for future elections and further elaboration where necessary.

Moreover, the problem remains that some candidates appear to believe that the Elections Committee remit extends to holding candidates accountable for the accuracy or fairness of political criticism of other candidates and used the complaints procedure to air these concerns. In the interests of both retaining a light-touch approach to Elections Committee intervention in elections and increasing engagement with elections, we should consider how this may be avoided in future. In particular, we should aim to make clear to candidates that it is their own, and the student press', responsibility, not CUSU's, to hold other candidates accountable.

Finally, there are a number of issues including endorsements, slating and the use of pre-existing lists that made up a large volume of the minor complaints during the elections. Elections Committee will review the existing rules and consider whether changes ought to be made.



## 6. Campaigning

The returning officer is incredibly thankful to the efforts put into the election by candidates and acknowledges that the strong voter turnout is in a large part due to their energies. While some improvements were made in giving candidates information about campaigning methods in advance of elections, this could be improved. In future, it would be wise to place greater emphasis on campaigning methods in the candidates' briefing and ensure that the briefing is given further in advance of the start of campaigning. Moreover, we should seek to have a day between the candidates' briefing and the start of campaigning, for the benefit of CUSU, GU, student press and candidates.

A significant improvement on the 2017 Michaelmas elections was no longer making Facebook events for all election candidates, instead encouraging candidates to make their own, and to send links to the committee for inclusion in communications. This helped make staff resource more efficient during the elections.

## 7. Complaints and sanctions

In recent years, CUSU and the GU have taken to teaming up to run a single election campaign to promote engagement and avoid having too many election cycles. Part of that is a single Elections Committee (EC), which rules on campaign breaches. This year's GU presidential election had 3 candidates contesting for the sabbatical position and one of the highest voter turnouts (10.2%) we have seen in the recent years.

Apart from rulings on other minor complainants, due to irregularities on the part of one of the candidate, the EC this year decided to disqualify one of the candidates. The disqualified candidate escalated their complaint to the Junior Proctor, who upheld the decision of the EC. The detailed rulings on this matter are attached in Appendix A.

## 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

The following candidates were returned as winners in the elections, the count sheet can be found on page 7

<b>Position</b>	<b>affiliation</b>	<b>elected</b>
GU President	GU	Sofia Ropek Hewson
Welfare & Rights Officer	GU/CUSU	Christine Pungong
CUSU President	CUSU	Evie Aspinall
Education Officer	CUSU	Matt Kite
Access & Funding Officer	CUSU	Shadab Ahmed
Disabled Students' Officer	CUSU	Emrys Travis
Women's Officer –	CUSU	Claire Sosienski Smith
University Councillor –	University	Marcel Llaverro Pasquina

## 10. Summary of recommendations

- A.** That the staff non-voting staff member should continue to sit on the elections committee, and the Graduate Union should consider this for its own elections
- B.** The specific elaboration of the rules should cover all possible rules, especially around the importance of the secret ballot.
- C.** Learn what leads to elections being contested, to ensure a broad range of candidates

**I confirm that these results here are accurate**

**Dr Darshana Joshi**

**University of Cambridge Graduate Union Returning Officer, lent term 2018  
Cambridge University Students' Union Deputy Returning Officer**



## GRADUATE UNION LENT ELECTIONS: COUNT SHEETS

### GU President count

#### With withdrawal of candidate COTTON, Joe:

Loading ballots from file graduateunion-17-18-gupresident\_1.blb.  
 Ballot file contains 4 candidates and 1128 ballots.  
 Removed withdrawn candidate 2 from the ballots.  
 Ballot file contains 891 non-empty ballots.

Counting votes for President using ERS97 STV.  
 3 candidates running for 1 seat.

	R GUHA MAJUMDAR,  Mrittunjoy	ROPEK HEWSON, Sofia	S Re-Open Nominat  ions (RON)	Exhausted	Surplus	Threshold
1	295.00	498.00	98.00	0.00	52.50	445.50

| Count of first choices. The initial quota is 445.50. Candidate ROPEK HEWSON, Sofia has reached  
 | the threshold and is elected.

Winner is ROPEK HEWSON, Sofia.

#### Without withdrawal of candidate COTTON, Joe:

Loading ballots from file graduateunion-17-18-gupresident\_1.blb.  
 Ballot file contains 4 candidates and 1128 ballots.  
 No candidates have withdrawn.  
 Ballot file contains 1128 non-empty ballots.

Counting votes for President using ERS97 STV.  
 4 candidates running for 1 seat.

	R GUHA MAJUMDAR,  , Mrittunjoy	ROPEK HEWSON, Sofia	COTTON, Joe	Re-Open Nominat  ations (RON)	Exhausted	Surplus	Threshold
1	239.00	349.00	498.00	42.00	0.00	0.00	564.00

| Count of first choices. The initial quota is 564.00. No candidates have surplus votes so  
 | candidates will be eliminated and their votes transferred for the next round.

2		430.00	574.00		124.00	72.00	502.00
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| All losing candidates are eliminated. Count after substage 1 of 1 of eliminating GUHA MAJUMDAR,  
 | Mrittunjoy and Re-Open Nominations (RON). Transferred votes with value 1.00. Since no candidate  
 | has been elected, the quota is reduced to 502.00. Candidate COTTON, Joe has reached the  
 | threshold and is elected.

Winner is COTTON, Joe.





### Welfare and Rights Officer

Ballot file contains 3 candidates and 2784 ballots.  
 Ballot file contains 2784 non-empty ballots.

Counting votes for Welfare and Rights Officer using ERS97 STV.  
 3 candidates running for 1 seat.

Round	PUNGONG, Christine	CHINULA, Walinase	Re-Open Nominations (RON)	Exhausted	Surpluses	Threshold
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1	1354.00	1065.00	365.00	0.00	0.00	1392.00
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Count of first choices. The initial quota is 1392.00. No candidates have surplus votes so candidates will be eliminated and their votes transferred for the next round.

2	1393.00	1100.00		291.00	146.50	1246.50
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All losing candidates are eliminated. Count after substage 1 of 1 of eliminating Re-Open Nominations (RON). Transferred votes with value 1.00. Since no candidate has been elected, the quota is reduced to 1246.50. Candidate PUNGONG, Christine has reached the threshold and is elected.

**Winner is PUNGONG, Christine.**



## **Appendix A**

### **Elections Committee statement on GU President election (29/03/18):**

The Elections Committee would like to announce that Sofia Ropek Hewson is duly confirmed as the President of the Graduate Union. Our congratulations to Sofia and we wish her the best of luck in the year ahead.

Congratulations must also go to the other two candidates for this role; Mrittunjoy Guhar Majumdar and Joe Cotton, who both displayed passion and commitment to the GU.

The Junior Proctor has upheld our decision to disqualify Joe Cotton in this election.

See our statement below for the details of this decision.

### **Elections Committee Ruling on appeal from Joe Cotton (16/03/18):**

In the opinion of the EC, this appeal has failed to address the key principle underlying the EC decision, that voters must feel free to cast their ballots free from influence. Joe could have had the rules on iPads clearly explained to him by emailing the EC, and in our opinion the rule is not phrased in such a way that a reasonable person would assume that it did not apply to iPads, and as such a candidate wishing to use them should have consulted the EC. The fact that Joe estimates that only 88 votes were cast on iPad is irrelevant, the decision was made without reference to votes but on the basis of the principle breached by Joe. We quote again from our original judgment: “We have made this decision based on the duty of the EC to apply the CUSU Standing Orders, which stand as they are based on the potential of this practice to influence voters, and the principle that voters must feel free to cast their ballots free from such influence.”

Having set aside the possibility of vote docking due to its dissatisfactory nature as a sanction, the EC was left with three choices: reinstating Joe without action, voiding the entire election, and maintaining our original ruling and disqualifying Joe. Having determined that a serious violation of the rules had occurred, reinstating Joe without action would not be acceptable. Voiding the election, the second alternative, was unsatisfactory for several reasons: First of all, the EC concluded that in this election, Joe’s rule breach does not undermine the legitimacy of the entire result, therefore voiding would be unconstitutional. More was required for an election to be voided than the breach of a rule by one candidate, and that an election ought to be voided only where the entire result was, for the reason that be, undemocratic. The impact that voiding the election would have on other candidates was taken into account. Since their breaches were dealt with during the election, it was held that voiding the election would



be punishing them for offences they did not commit. Disqualification, therefore, appears to be the most satisfactory sanction both when it comes to reflecting the severity and importance of the rule breached and to ensure that no candidate who breached the rules severely is able to take part in the election.

For this reason and all the others we have laid out above, we dismiss this appeal.

### **Elections Committee Ruling on complaint against Joe Cotton and provisional results of GU Presidential Election:**

The CUSU-GU Elections Committee has chosen to disqualify Joe Cotton from the GU Presidential Election. This is due to a breach of the CUSU Standing Orders, Article G.10.viii, which reads “no candidate or member of their campaign team, or any other person attempting to influence a voter may approach within three metre of the polling station except when they themselves are voting”. In this instance, the breach relates to Joe’s use of an iPad when encouraging voters to vote in the GU elections. According to the evidence available to the EC, insufficient steps were taken by Joe to provide space to those casting ballots on the iPad he had provided.

While the EC notes that this rule may not have been sufficiently communicated to candidates in the candidates briefing, we wish to highlight that the CUSU election rules state that the rules are “to be read in conjunction with the CUSU Constitution and Standing Orders, which can be accessed on the CUSU website”. Moreover, for clarity, while the relevant breach relates to the CUSU Standing Orders, in this instance the election was “delegated to CUSU” and “governed by CUSU electoral rules and procedures” as per Schedule E.6 of the GU Schedules.

The EC wishes to highlight that it does not believe Joe intentionally attempted to coerce or intimidate voters due to this method. We have made this decision based on the duty of the EC to apply the CUSU Standing Orders, which stand as they are based on the potential of this practice to influence voters, and the principle that voters must feel free to cast their ballots free from such influence.

Moreover, we recognise that we do not know to what extent this breach impacted the election results, and recognise efforts by Joe to make voters aware of other candidates in the election. However, this breach, which came to EC’s attention shortly before the close of voting, required a disciplinary response from EC. As a result, EC came to the decision that Joe’s use of this method of campaigning throughout the election required that he be disqualified from the election.



Joe will be given the opportunity to appeal this ruling to Elections Committee within the next 48 hours, and the opportunity to make a further appeal to the Junior Proctor if the decision is upheld.

Below are the vote totals of the election, first as an amended count based on the disqualification of Joe Cotton, and second on original vote totals. The provisional winner, pending appeal, is Sofia Ropek Hewson.