

Imperial College Union  
**Sabbatical Elections 2009**  
*A Note by Christian Carter*  
*Returning Officer*

### **Overview and Results**

On the whole, the elections went very smoothly. I think there are a few issues which can be ironed out and I will address those in this report. We had a record turnout over 25%, all credit to the candidates.

The results are as follows:

President	Ashley Brown
DPFS	Daniel Hill
DPCS	Jenny Wilson
DPE	Jonathan Silver
DPW	John James
Felix Editor	Dan Wan
Student Trustees	Mark Mearing-Smith
	Amaury Fastenakels
	Esther Kang
	Shah Rahman

### **Appointments**

There was issue with the appointment of the Elections Committee. The Court failed to enquire with the chosen members whether they were available or would like to take up the appointment, they also failed to inform the members of their position once chosen. This obviously caused a stir and it was not until the close of nominations before we had a full Elections Committee. Suggested solution: The court should be informed the dates of the election a month in advance giving them more time to prepare.

Sabbatical Officers are perfect candidates for the position of Returning Officer due to their knowledge and experience of the Union, unfortunately the position of RO is time demanding and I soon found I was not able to keep up with my day to day activities without appointing a Deputy RO. The President and the DPEW had issue with my choice of DRO, due to the fact that he worked for College. I did not foresee this as an issue, it was not unconstitutional in anyway and the decision was approved by ICU Court. I look to the Court to make a ruling on this that will set precedent or indeed an addendum to our Election Regulations.

### **Nominations**

During nominations it became apparent that the candidates were not aware of some of our more basic rules such as campaigning before the close of nominations. I decided to email each candidate on the day that they stood explaining this rule to them and also highlighting when the initial candidates meeting would be held. I have asked systems to automate this process for next year and also send out the candidates pack. This will simplify any rule breaking by ignorance and will also shorten the initial candidates meeting.

### **Campaign and Voting period**

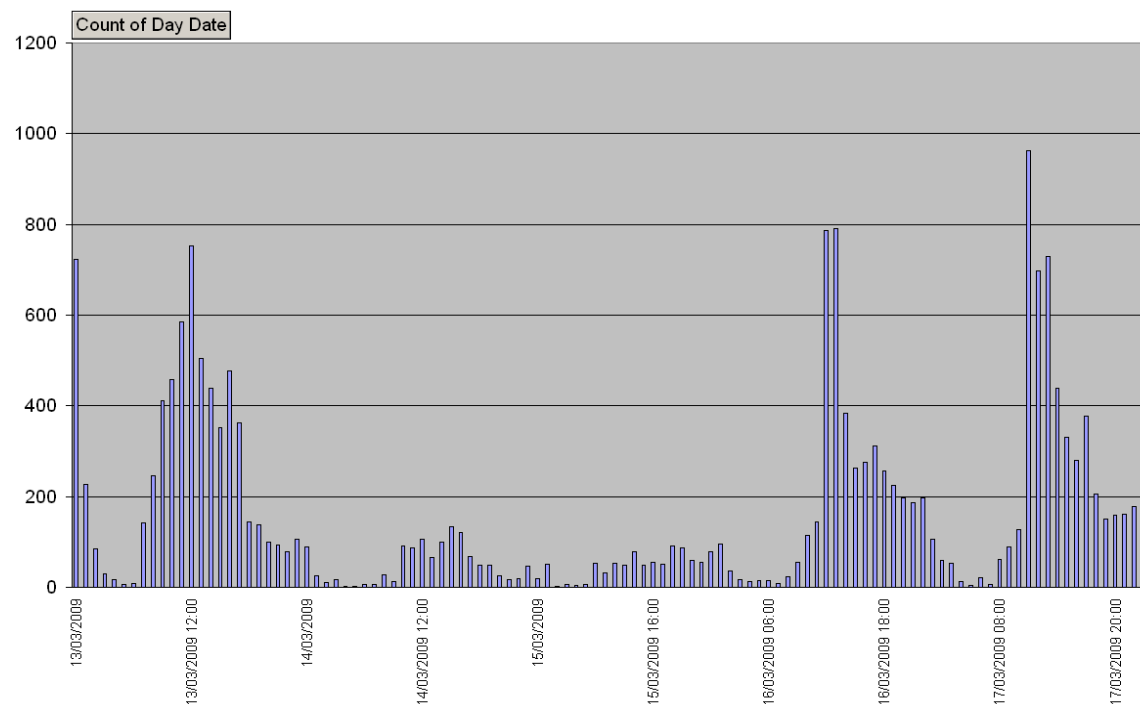
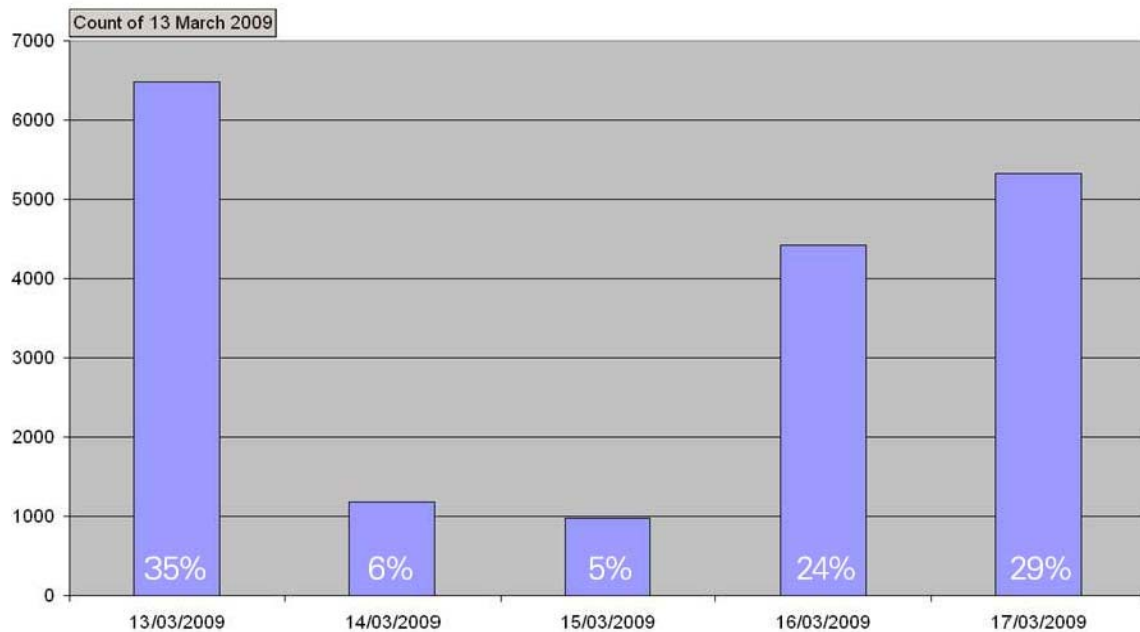
**Posters:** Every year there a complaints that posters are taken down/postered over and this year was no exception. The culprits this year were identified as clubs and externals. I believe the reason for this occurring is mainly due to the lack of poster space available and is not an attempt to sabotage another's campaign. Other than petitioning college for more poster

space, the only solution is to keep a close eye on the posters. I made sure I checked the boards at least once a day during the elections.

**Media:** There were media related complaints involving both IC Radio and *Live!* The complaints were with regard to unfair coverage of certain candidates. The solution to this would be for the RO to email all the media chairs in advance of the election so that they know where they stand. All the media should be independent; The Felix editor is not allowed to support or second anyone in the election and neither are the Sabbatical Officers. In order to keep the media independent I suggest the same rules are set in place for the Live! Editor, Guildsheet Editor, Broadsheet Editor, IC Radio Chair, Stoic TV Manager and any other ICU recognised media position. Note that this would not affect these officers' right to vote in the elections just as Sabbatical Officers are eligible to vote.

**Internet devices:** While there were no reported incidents of campaigning at the ballot box this year, there has in the past been an issue with students passing laptops round lectures etc. This year has seen the strong introduction of internet phones such as the iPhone and Blackberries, under a previous interpretation that defined a ballot box as any device with an active internet connection and capable of connecting to the voting site, these phones are deemed as ballot boxes and hence an opportunity to bulk vote has arisen with this flux of technology. I suggest that all campaigning is forbidden during the voting period. This eliminates the issue of campaigning at the ballot box and also irons out the more severe complaints that get made during voting. The campaign period would then run from the close of nominations until the opening of voting. During the voting period, the only permissible elections publicity would be that produced by the Returning Officer and the Union encouraging voting but obviously not supporting any particular candidate.

**Voting period:** The voting period has traditionally opened on Friday morning at 00.01 and continued till 23.59 on Tuesday, this year followed the same pattern. It came to my attention that the majority of votes occurred on the Friday, Monday and Tuesday in fact less than 12 % of votes cast were made over the weekend. I suggest that the voting period is limited to 3 days during the week (e.g. Wednesday to Friday). The constitutional requirement is for voting to include as a minimum the period between 1000 hrs and 1700 hrs on two consecutive College days and as a maximum five whole days. The use of the maximum permissible time does not necessarily significantly increase turnout as it is likely that those people voting over the weekend would have voted at some other point during the voting period had they not been able to vote over the weekend. The use of a shorter voting period may actually help turnout throughout the Union by reducing electoral fatigue.



**Reminder emails:** Although many get annoyed when the reminder emails are sent out on the Monday and Tuesday mornings, as you can see from the graph above, it has the desired effect with significant spikes in the votes cast.

**Printing prices:** The price at which we account printing was reduced this year to be in line with the current library printing rates, I advise that this figure is reviewed each year to match the rates of the SK Library.

**Deposits:** This year I enforced a stricter set of rules on the submission of deposits by a given deadline, I recommend a set of guidelines (including fines) are devised before the elections and sent out as part of the automatic email generated when a candidate stands. As the deposit is there to allow some middle ground in the handling of a complaint, no candidate should be permitted to campaign in any way until such time as they have submitted their deposit and the Returning Officer notified of this. As a possible sanction is the partial withholding of a deposit, deposits should only be accepted as cash payments as it is not

possible to withhold part of a cheque. This would prevent the case that occurs every year with people submitting deposits late and yet not having any notable impact on their campaign.

### **Online System**

The online system is brilliant. There is room for improvement in the front end, the way names and positions are displayed are hard to view and work is being undertaken on this at the moment.

I have also noted an automatic email to be sent upon standing (mentioned above)

### **ALL COMPLAINTS**

Printing Costs. The printing costs for college computers or at home were too expensive. **Complaint Upheld, Action taken:** Changed rates to be inline with the library's current price structure.

**RESOLVED**

Poster removal on walkway. Several posters were removed and postered on top of. I was alerted to a number of parties. None of them appeared to be direct sabotage from another candidate or campaigner. The culprits were mostly clubs, and externals. **Action taken:** Where possible they were contacted and warned. I received thorough apologies and was satisfied.

**RESOLVED**

Stoic TV publicity. Complaint that Stoic TV manager had not published the use of the JCR screens to everyone. It should be noted that a contact email address for Stoic was offered in the CP along with all the other main media at ICU **Action taken:** Emailed Stoic TV manager asking to email all candidates with a rates card/list of prices and what was available.

**RESOLVED**

Spamming public Facebook event. Complaint that a candidate was posting on the wall of a public facebook event and therefore spamming the general public. Upon investigation, it was noted that the event was private and that all but one of the admins of the event was a campaigner for the candidate. **No action was deemed necessary.**

**RESOLVED**

IC Radio Interviews. Complaint that the IC radio interviews were not conducted in a fair manner as to include all the candidates. Although all candidates were contacted, some were emailed and some were only briefed in person (with the impression they would be emailed a confirmation time) Although the RO felt that there was no intentional favouring of a particular candidate, he did feel that the matter should be referred to the Elections Committee.

A further complaint came through when these interviews were posted on *Live!*

#### **STATEMENT FROM THE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE:**

The Elections Committee have considered this complaint and acknowledge that an unfair advantage was given to a certain candidate in the Deputy President (Finance and Services) election by means of I.C Radio Media. The Elections Committee are satisfied that the Returning Officer did everything within his power to mitigate the impact of this and they believe it would be inappropriate to take further action.

**RESOLVED**

Campaigning in Halls. Complaint against a candidate having a campaigner hand out flyers and sweets in halls. The circumstances behind this complaint relied on statements from witnesses and hence I referred this to the Elections Committee.

During the meeting circumstances became apparent to the complainant which made him withdraw the complaint.

**RESOLVED**

## **QUERIES**

There were two queries of the Returning Officers decision to extend certain deadlines.

Deposits. There are no guidelines in the Elections Regs or CP. I was guided by set precedent which was to not allow participation in hustings. The candidate complaining requested disqualification from the elections for those who did not get their deposits in on time. I felt this was extraordinarily out of proportion. It should also be noted that the regulations require deposits to be paid prior to the close of nominations meaning no candidate submitted their deposit on time, including the complainant. The deadline had already been extended as had been practice in previous elections and the failure to comply with this new deadline only affected three candidates, all of which were for the student trustee position and so in a different election to the complainant.

**RESOLVED**

Manifestos. It was questioned that those manifestos received after the deadline should not be uploaded to the website. My decision was to upload them one day prior to the start of voting. It was explained that the RO felt this action sufficient impediment for missing the deadline.

**RESOLVED**

## **INFORMATION TO CANDIDATES**

### **Deposits**

The finance office still holds a lot of deposits, If you have not collected yours please come to the finance office and ask Zona. She will need your CID Card to match against your name.

### **Refunds**

Refunds are now ready, you have been contacted by email. Please collect your refund in cash and sign for it in the finance office.

### **Many thanks to:**

Jon Matthews - DRO  
The Elections committee  
Ellie Jay - ICU Court  
Will Dugdale – systems  
Alex Mckee – publicity

CLC – 24 April 2009