

Elections 2014/15 Review & Action Plan

1. Introduction

“Democratic” is one of the Union’s values, stating that it is a fundamental part of what we do as an organisation. Our commitment to this value is borne out in our year-on-year approach to elections. Last year we had more students than ever interact with our elections, however the percentage of Postgraduates voting reduced from 17% to 15%. One of the main focuses from last year’s Elections Review was to address this decline and increase Postgraduate engagement in our processes.

2. Your Reps & Council Elections 2014/15

2.1 BACKGROUND

This was the fourth year of branding the Autumn elections as the election for Academic Representatives. Using the name ‘Your Reps & Council Elections 2014/15’ we elected Year and Course Reps, 16 Ordinary Members of Union Council and the LGBT and International Officers.

2.2 TIMETABLE

Nominations Opened	28 September 2014
Nominations Closed	13 November 2014
Voting Opened	18 October 2014
Voting Closed	22 October 2014
Results Announced	23 October 2014

2.3 TURNOUT

4,600 students voted in the election, up slightly from 4,597 the year before. This represented a turnout of 26.8%, which was below the 27% the previous year due to a larger electoral role. Whilst it was a disappointment not to increase the overall turnout, 26.8% still represents what we think to be the largest turnout for a non full-time officer election in the UK. What was interesting was that the number of Postgraduate students who voted increased from 1,042 to 1,094 whilst Undergraduate voters reduced from 3,555 to 3,506.

2.4 LEARNING POINTS

Having not amended our approach significantly it was no surprise that we didn’t see any change in turnout. Whilst the turnout is high for an election like this, we clearly would want to see more students engaging with our Academic Representation Network from early on in the academic year. Currently we provide no support or training to candidates in running their campaign or writing their manifesto. This is something we should look into for future elections.

3. The Big Elections 2015

3.1 BACKGROUND

One of the learning points from last year was to promote the candidates training sessions earlier in the process. We started talking about the range of sessions from the start of the New Year.

We also produced a number of videos featuring existing role holders describing what students should expect if they ran for that positions.

Following on from a decision at Governance Committee all Clubs, Societies & Projects with over 150 members were automatically made part of The Big Elections 2015.

For the third year running Jim Dickinson, Chief Executive at UEA Students' Union was appointed by the Trustee Board as Returning Officer, with staff support from the Governance & Administration Manager and Education & Welfare Manager looking after the day-to-day administration of the election as Deputy Returning Officers (DROs).

3.2 TIMETABLE

Training Sessions	28 January – 2 March 2015
Nominations Opened	2 February 2015
Nominations Closed	1 March 2015
Voting Opened	6 March 2015
Voting Closed	13 March 2015
Results Announced	13 March 2015

3.3 DELIVERY

Training sessions were once again poorly attended at first however later sessions proved popular and were a helpful tool for encouraging students to stand. The majority of those attending were not considering running for full-time positions and so the content wasn't always best targeted.

We run a campaign early on in the process aimed at dispelling myths about who can stand for elections. For example Postgraduates students can't run, nor can International students. We ran these across the screen in the Union Building and also around campus in poster form.

The 'What to expect' videos were a useful tool that were well viewed on the website. The anecdotal feedback we received was that they helped students get an idea about what the roles were about and helped them decided what to run for.

There was some considerable negative feedback from a small number of CSPs that were automatically made part of The Big Elections 2015. Each of the groups were met with and their concerns discussed. What was made clear from the feedback was that the main issues were around the timing of the elections and the fact that many groups wanted to hold some form of interview/competency element to the process. It is suggested that we collate our findings for consideration with our Elections Action Plan at the next Governance Committee meeting.

The number of overall candidates was higher than in 2014/15, however the number of candidates standing for Officer Trustee positions was 11 compared to 18 in the previous year.

A new system for delivering targeted emails about the elections was developed. It allowed for personalised email to be sent to any student that had not yet voted, as well as emails targeted to specific demographics.

3.4 TURNOUT

Turnout for The Big Elections 2015 was our highest ever, we also achieved a higher number of students voting and votes cast. Apart from a short period on the Tuesday of voting we always tracked ahead of the previous year's turnout and by the end of the week we had moved ahead of 2011/12.



The total number of voters was 7,258 compared to 6,537 in the previous year with 161,546 votes cast up from 151,802. Once again this made The Big Elections the largest ever student vote in the UK and regained us our position as the highest turnout in England and Wales.

The number of Undergraduate students voting was up from 5,431 in 2013/14 to 5,484 in 2014/15, however due to a larger electoral roll this was a slight percentage drop. Postgraduates however increased from 1,106 to 1,774 representing a massive jump from 15% to 22% for The Big Elections 2015. This was the highest level of engagement we have ever had from our Postgraduate members, with the previous highest being 19% in 2011/12. This was a fantastic success and a real testament to the hard work we have been making in engaging with the Postgraduate community over the year. However, once again, there is still a lot of work to do with 59% of Undergraduates voting.

The Results Party was once again a great success and the perfect way to end a superb week for the Union.

3.5 COMPLAINTS

One candidate was removed from the election for continued abuse of mailing lists and social media. The candidate appealed to the Governance Committee which upheld the ROs decision to remove the candidate. There were no other major complaints during the process.

3.6 LEARNING POINTS

We need to find a better way of communicating the opportunity of running for election to our members. 11 candidates for the full-time positions was disappointing. We should not be afraid to talk about the positions as genuine career-enhancing graduate jobs. We should focus more on the wealth of skills and experience that are gained from working as an Officer Trustee for a year.

The targeted email system worked well and certainly drove a large number of votes. We must continue to enhance the way we communicate the benefit and importance of voting in our elections whilst balancing that against over-communicating with our members.

It is still clear that many CSPs are not holding democratic elections and for those that were automatically included in The Big Elections 2015 this was highlighted.

The increase in the number of Postgraduates voting is too large to be a one-off. We have improved and honed our message to Postgraduate students, however the Union as a whole has improved how we cater for the differing needs of our Postgraduate community. It is not possible to engage Postgraduate students just for The Big Elections 2015, we must – and have, engage with them throughout their time at Imperial. We have a long way to go, but this increase is a sign that we are moving in the right direction.

6. Conclusions

Our strategic aim SV1 within Amplifying the Student Voice looks to increase the number of students who take part in the election every year during the plan. In Appendix A it shows that again this year we have once again achieved this goal.

Overall the number of times a student voted in an election increased from 11,134 to 11,858 a difference of 724. As an average percentage of turnout across each year's elections 2014/15 saw a mean of 34.7% a 1.3% increase on 2013/14 at 33.4%.

There will be a complete set of action plans for next year's elections presented in the next Governance Committee.