

Sheffield University Students' Union

Returning Officers' Report: Full Time SU Officer Elections 2021

Contents

1. Summary of Election and Results
2. Election Support
3. Election Schedule
4. Voter Turnout
5. Candidates
6. Election Rules and Incidents
7. Recommendations

1. Summary of Results

Between **22nd and 24th March 2021** votes for the following were held concurrently:

- 7 Full Time Students' Union Officers
- 2 Elected Student Trustees
- 2 Referenda
- 3 SU Councillor Bye-Elections

The full results for each election can be found in the appendices. The final results of these elections were:

SU President:	Evie Croxford (elected, out of 8 candidates, in the 5 th round)
Activities & Development Officer:	Morgan McArthur (elected, out of 3 candidates, in the 1 st round)
Education Officer:	Savannah Hanson (elected, out of 4 candidates, in the 2 nd round)
International & Community Officer:	Taylor Ogle (elected, out of 5 candidates, in the 5 th round)
Wellbeing & Sport Officer:	Charlotte McGinley (elected, out of 2 candidates in the 1 st round)
Welfare & Sustainability Officer:	Anesu (Ness) Matanda-Mambigo (elected, out of 5 candidates, in the 2 nd round)
Liberation Officer:	Shona Tulloch (elected, out of 5 candidates, in the 3 rd round)
Elected Student Trustees:	Clara Polaco (elected, out of 9 candidates, in the 5 th round) Amber Lench (elected, out of 9 candidates, in the 7 th round)

Referendum:

The question was asked '*Should Sheffield SU remain affiliated to the National Union of Students?*'

The proposal **passed** by the required simple majority vote in favour.

Yes 2171

No 179

Abstain 151

Referendum:

The question was asked '*Do you agree with the proposed changes to the Students' Union Constitution which implement the result of the Officer Roles Review Referendum?*'

The proposal **passed** by the required a two-thirds majority vote in favour.

Yes 1525

No 452

Abstain 176

2. Election Support

The **Returning Officers** were responsible for deciding on any matter relating to the conduct of the election. This includes the power to penalise or exclude candidates in respect of any breach of election regulations. The Returning Officers for these elections were:

Joel Kirk (Activities Officer)

Holly Ellis (Welfare Officer)

Thomas Hill (English Language and Linguistics Councillor)

The **Senior Returning Officer** was responsible for advising the Returning Officers on serious breaches of the Election Rules. The Senior Returning Officer for these elections was:

The National Union of Students

The **Elections Committee** advised on the promotion and organisation of the election, on regulations for publicity and on the rules for candidates. The Elections Committee for these elections was:

Joel Kirk (Activities Officer)

Nadja Horvat-Markovic (Mature Students' Councillor)

Raphael Galleh (Clinical Dentistry Councillor)

The **Elections Working Group** consisted of Students' Union staff and the SU President. The group was responsible for planning and delivering all operational aspects of the election, in line with the steer provided by the Elections Committee and the decisions of the Returning Officers. The Elections Working Group for these elections was:

Beth Eyre (SU President)

Neil MacKenzie (Associate Director of Membership)

Chris Howett (Digital Producer)

Phoebe Clarke (Marketing Executive)

Sarah Pugh (Membership Engagement Coordinator)

3. Election Schedule

This year's election period schedule was as follows:

Nominations open:	Monday 22 nd February 2021 (10am)
Nominations close:	Friday 5 th March 2021 (5pm)
Candidate training:	Sunday 7 th March 2021 (10am-3pm)
Campaigning starts. Candidates announced:	Monday 15 th March 2021 (10am)
Deadline date to withdraw from election:	Wednesday 17 th March 2021 (10am)
Voting opens:	Monday 22 nd March 2021 (10am)
Voting closes:	Wednesday 24 th March 2021 (5pm)
Results announced:	Thursday 25 th March 2021 (from 7.30pm)

4. Voter Turnout

'Voter turnout' refers to the total number of eligible students who voted in the elections. Voter turnout in these elections was 5479. This is a decrease of 3,904 from 2020, in which voter turnout was the highest number of unique voters ever recorded in Officer Elections at Sheffield Students' Union, at 9383. Voter turnout this year was approximately 17% of the student population, decreasing from 30% in 2020/21.

The fall in turnout this year is attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to a national lockdown, all elections publicity and candidate campaigning adhered to legal restrictions on limiting transmission. Therefore, the vast majority of campaigning took place via the use of social media. With limited physical means to promote their campaigns, it is likely that visibility among the student body of the elections and candidates was negatively impacted. There was also evidence of lower engagement and fatigue of online activity among students across other areas of SU activity at this point in the year which may also have been a factor.

The fall in turnout may also be attributed to the change in the SU Officer roles following an Officer Roles Review Referendum this year. However, an increase in candidate numbers demonstrates an awareness of the new roles among the student population, and so this is likely not a sole factor for the fall in turnout.

Voter turnout and student population during the past 10 sets of Full Time Officer Elections are given below. (Please note: The University hasn't released final student demographic information on the current or previous academic years, so populations given are approximate).

Election Year	Student Population	Voter Turnout	Percentage turnout
2011/12	24,916	8,543	34.2%
2012/13	25,805	8,996	34.8%
2013/14	24,767	9,209	37.1%

2014/15	27,230	7,029	25.8%
2015/16	27,947	6,599	23.6%
2016/17	28,848	8,605	29.8%
2017/18	29,666	8,065	27.1%
2018/19	29,717	8,270	27.8%
2019/20	(approx.) 31,500	9,383	30%
2020/21	(approx.) 32,000	5,479	17%

The voter turnout in per election was as follows:

Election	Voter Turnout
SU President	3,835
Activities & Development Officer	3,624
Education Officer	3,459
International & Community Officer	3,012
Wellbeing & Sport Officer	3,056
Welfare & Sustainability Officer	3,092
Liberation Officer	3,047
Elected Student Trustee	2,310
NUS Referendum	2,501
Constitutional Amendment Referendum	2,153
Voter Turnout across all Elections	5,479

5. Candidates

As the positions being elected this year are different to previous years, a position by position comparison is not possible. However, the overall number of candidates across the Officer and Trustee Elections increased from 32 in 2019/20, 41 this year.

A standard objective for all-student elections is that each position is contested (has more candidates standing than there are vacancies). This objective was achieved for all elections.

6. Election Rules and Complaints

The Election Rules (Appendix A) were approved in advance in line with the Students' Union Constitution and Bye-Law 16 Election Regulations. All candidates agreed to the rules as a compulsory requirement, and were required to undertake a rules briefing prior to campaigning.

The Returning Officers received 9 complaints during the elections. This is in comparison with 10 complaints being received during the 2020 Officer Elections. The Returning Officers met at least once per day during the campaigning period and made rulings on all complaints within 1 working day. Of the 9 complaints, 7 were dismissed and 2 upheld. Sanctions ranged from specific actions

such as removing campaign material to a reduction in campaign budget. A standby Election Appeals Committee was convened, pursuant to the Students' Union Constitution, and heard one appeal.

SU Officer Elections 2020/2021 Summary of Complaints:

Rule	Complaints Received
Supplementary Election Rules 1.2 All candidates and their campaign teams are expected to abide by National, University and Students' Union regulations and guidance for limiting transmission during the pandemic.	1
Supplementary Election Rules 1.5 During an election, all candidates, their campaigners, and all members of the Union shall act in the interests of a fair and properly conducted election, in which all Full Members are able to cast a vote, by secret ballot, for their preferred elected leadership, without influence or pressure from any other individual or group, and in which all candidates will have a fair chance of contesting, and being elected to their position.	1
Supplementary Election Rules 2.4.1 (candidates and campaigners may not) undertake and public campaigning activity, as defined by section 2.1 of these rules, before candidates' names are announced at 10am Monday 15th March.	2
Supplementary Election Rules 2.4.2 (candidates and campaigners may not)	1
Supplementary Election Rules 2.4.3 and 2.4.4 (candidates and campaigners may not) seek to influence or deliberately observe a member who is engaged in the act of voting on any device, nor provide voters with a voting platform (e.g. a smartphone, tablet, etc.) or make any "false statement of fact" in relation to a candidate's personal character, manifesto or conduct.	1
Supplementary Election Rules 2.4.7 (candidates and campaigners may not) induce or gain votes through any financial means, meaning the offering, giving, solicitation or the acceptance of any inducement or reward including, but not limited to, the use of currency in any form, physical or digital payment or benefit. (e.g. amazon vouchers, event tickets, random prize draws of money or goods)	3

7. Notable incidents and Recommendations of the Returning Officers

- 7.1** 3 complaints were received regarding the rule against inducing votes by financial means, 2 of which were upheld where the activity in question was felt to infringe upon the spirit of this rule.
- 7.2** 2 complaints of early campaigning were received, and both were dismissed. The rule against campaigning before the announce of candidates is a source of a significant proportion of complaints each year and may require reviewing, for example by having no formal beginning to campaigning, or by having clearer guidance around what constitutes "campaigning" on social media.

- 7.3** Each year difficulties arise due to the unavoidable personal connections between candidates, voters and Returning Officers and conflicts of interest, perceived or actual. During elections, significant time is also required of those acting as Returning Officers. External (non-student) Returning Officers are common across the Student's Union sector. The Students' Union may wish to explore the possibility of implementing an external Returning Officer system in future to limit risk to the organisation and the impact of the above factors upon elections. This would require amending both the Students' Union Constitution and Bye Laws, and could be considered as part of the next set of Constitutional changes which are undertaken.
- 7.4** The Returning Officers noted that at present the process of communicating decisions relating to non-declaration of campaign expenditure is unspecified. This could be made clearer in future elections.

The elections were agreed by the Returning Officers to be fair and properly conducted.

Joel Kirk (Activities Officer 2020-21)
Activities.Officer@sheffield.ac.uk

Holly Ellis (Welfare Officer 2020-21)
Welfare.Officer@sheffield.ac.uk

Thomas Hill (English Language and Linguistics Councillor)

April 2021