



Official Report

1. Elected Candidates

Full time Officers

Union President	Patrick O'Donnell
Academic Officer	Matt Johnstone
York Sport President	Maddi Cannell
Activities Officer	Brian Terry
Community and Wellbeing Officer	Carly Precious

Part time Officers

Women and Non-Binary Officer	Daisy Slate & Neha Shah
LGBTQ Officer	Matt Rogan & Daniel Loyd
Working Class and Social Mobility Officer	Kate Archer & Lucy Mason
BAME Students' Officer	Fiks Aderemi & Simi Odukoya
Disabled Students' Officer	Victoria Cornford & Rowan Casey
International Students' Officer	Moeen Bhatti & Polina Belkina
RAG Officer	Max Stafford
Volunteering Officer	Hayley Callaway
Environment and Ethics Officer	Charlotte Ingrey
Mature Students' Officer	Josh Mackenzie and Heather Green

Non-Officers

Faculty Rep (Sciences)	Pippa Davies
Faculty Rep (Social Sciences)	Rokas Subacius
Faculty Rep (Arts and Humanities)	Catherine Brislane

By-Elections

We reopened nominations for the unfilled positions on Monday 2nd March (12pm) and voting took place between the 9th-12th March. The positions filled were:

- Mature Students' Officer
- Environment and Ethics Officer

On average, 343 ballots were cast per position, which is significantly greater than last year, where we saw an average of 249.

2. Statistics

- 4,896 voters
 - Whilst this is a reduction in voters compared to last year (6,240), this reflects 4 days of voting compared to 5 days. The rate of voters per day was almost equal to last year.
- 40,569 ballots cast
 - This is an increase in ballots cast compared to last year (37,998) despite the drop in turnout and shorter voting period.
- 23.8% turnout
- 45% average increase in votes for Part-time Officer positions
- Less than a 15% candidate dropout rate prior to candidates being publicly announced, with none dropping out after this stage
- 16 out of 18 roles filled (2 going to By-Election)
- 36 candidates ran in the election (29 nominations due to paired candidates)
- £3,672 raised for charitable causes, with the University generously donating 75p for every unique voter.

[Here is the full breakdown of voting statistics by demographic](#)

3. Reflection on Aims

Diversity

We took a proactive approach to improving equality of opportunity and participation in the elections this year, as we believe more diverse student representation benefits all. The main addition to our diversity approach was running targeted workshops specifically for BAME, working class and disabled students. The aim of these workshops was to provide information about the elections and the importance of student representation, explore access and participation at York and gain insight into the barriers to participation at YUSU. Only six students attended these three sessions overall, however almost all attendees went on to nominate themselves in the election and four were elected to become officers. As such, we hope to continue this positive action and targeted work next year; building upon the rich discussions we had in sessions this year to break down the barriers to participation in YUSU. It's worth noting that the work we did around diversity during the election is part of a wider YUSU approach to widening participation at York. We have secured funding for a range of

widening participation activities - including money to support development work the BAME, Working Class and Disabled student networks.

Positively, six out of seven of our Part-time Officer roles were filled in the main election. This includes the BAME, Disabled and Working Class Officer roles, which are traditionally left unfilled and are diverted to by-elections. Voter engagement also widened, with the number of ballots cast for all our Liberation Part-time Officer roles significantly increasing on last year. The number of ballots cast for the Part-time Officer roles increased by an average of 45%, despite the decrease in overall turnout. The Women and Non- Binary Officer position received the most significant PTO role engagement, totaling over 2,700 votes. This shift in students voting for all roles rather than just the Sabbatical Officer roles, as is traditionally the case, suggests an increased presence and significance of PTOs and liberation representation at York.

Candidate Wellbeing

Following feedback on welfare issues in previous years, we made improving candidate wellbeing a key target for 2020. Our alterations were designed to mitigate the pressure on candidates, giving a more focused campaigning period to reduce time away from their academic studies. We reduced the voting and physical campaigning periods by a day and campaigning was limited to 9am-10pm (it has been unrestricted in previous years). Candidates had mixed opinions* on these adjustments, however the majority were in favour of the changes. Most candidates were positive about the restrictions, noting that the time limits allowed them time to relax, whilst the shortened campaign period was a good length. However, other candidates felt the shortened period did not allow them enough time to canvas support and the time limits prevented them from engaging with student groups, particularly those that ran events outside the allotted campaigning times.

Another provision put in place for candidate wellbeing this year was our Advice and Support service openly prioritising candidates needing appointments during the election period. This was taken advantage of by one student and feedback from other candidates noted having this option if they needed it was appreciated. When asked about the overall extent to which the organisation of the elections supported their wellbeing, the average score out of 5 (1 being "Not at all" and 5 being "Very much") was 3.6. Many candidates commented that they felt very supported by staff and knew they could reach out if they needed to. The main reasons for the lower scores revolved around the perceived lack of action and clarity around complaints.

*The candidate feedback in this report is based on the views of 16 candidates who had filled out the Candidate feedback form at the point of the report being published. The feedback form remains open and we hope the remaining candidates will submit their views, which will then be taken into account in future elections planning.

4.Complaints/Enquiries

On the whole, the tone of the elections was positive. Candidates appeared to treat each other with respect in the main, issues were raised in good faith and action was taken promptly where necessary. Candidates predominantly raised complaint enquiries via email and I recorded the following:

- 15 complaint enquiries
- 7 upheld

The majority of the enquiries related to: posters being allegedly taken down; endorsements; alleged slating; and perceived negative campaigning.

A number of candidates self reported infringements - e.g. endorsements and early online campaigning. This was pleasing and demonstrated positive engagement with the rules and a desire to make the elections as fair as possible. Candidates largely responded well to requests from me to act in relation to infringements or unforeseen issues - they were courteous and understanding. In the vast majority of cases, candidates seemed to accept and trust my decisions.

That being said, I note from the feedback that there was a perception, from some candidates, about a lack of action in relation to complaints. Understandably, there is often a gap between what candidates expect in relation to sanctions and what the outcome is. This is common in most forms of complaint handling. However, I think there is learning for YUSU in relation to: how we manage expectations via communication of the rules, the nature and specificity of the rules themselves, and the limitations around evidence in decision-making.

There was a specific situation towards the end of the election period where multiple candidates reported an alleged infringement by another candidate. Video evidence was provided, but was not clear enough for me to decide, 'on the balance of probabilities', whether the alleged infringement had occurred. As such, I decided not to uphold the complaint. The reporting candidates were understandably unhappy with the outcome, but there seemed to be a misconception that action had not been taken. Some of the reporting candidates seemed to perceive my decision not to uphold their complaint as tantamount to inaction and a willingness not to enforce the rules.

Related to this issue, concerns were raised about whether applying the standard of 'balance of probabilities' was reasonable in relation to election complaints. It was suggested that it is extremely difficult, in some situations, for students to acquire evidentiary proof (videos, screenshots etc), therefore it would be more reasonable to give more weighting to student statements. Whilst I completely understand the challenge of providing evidence in the context of SU elections, I feel it's important to maintain a robust approach - particularly in situations where it's one word against another. We make clear in the rules that sanctions must be proportional, reasonable and based on the evidence provided. In my view, requiring video or pictorial evidence - complemented by witness statements - is completely reasonable given the limited resources we have to police candidate conduct. We would leave ourselves

open to complaints and risk if we were to start sanctioning candidates without substantive evidence.

Nick Glover, Deputy Returning Officer

5. Key Insights and Recommendations

Training and development - We ran 10 training sessions during the nomination and development periods (between the end of nominations and the start of online campaigning). Candidate participation during development week was positive, with strong attendance at the following workshops: 'digital campaigning', 'manifesto development' and 'banner making'. However, participation at workshops held before the end of the nomination period was low. One theory is that students who were considering standing (particularly for Sabbatical positions), wanted to keep their 'cards close to their chest' and thought attending these sessions would reveal their intended nomination to other students. Students have also suggested that earlier (Autumn Term) information sessions about the elected positions would help encourage students not already involved with YUSU, to run.

- In future elections, training sessions aimed at inspiring students to run will be organised earlier, before students view themselves as potential candidates and competitors. This should also help to increase the diversity of candidates by empowering those students - who have never considered standing for election and don't know much about YUSU democracy - to learn about the roles and consider putting themselves forward before the nomination period opens.

RON - Unlike the previous two years, there was no official RON (re-open nominations) campaign this year.

Personal development - Of those who completed our post-election survey, 100% of candidates told us that running in the election positively contributed to their personal development, developed new skills or enhanced existing skills. The most highlighted skills were campaigning, communication and resilience. We were extremely pleased to receive this feedback - it demonstrates that the process of running in the YUSU elections, notwithstanding the result, provides valuable personal development opportunities for students.

Rules - After the election, we asked candidates to rate 'how easy the election rules were to understand', out of five (with 1 being 'very difficult' and 5 being 'very easy'). We received an average of 3.2, indicating that understanding of the rules was mixed. Since the end of the elections we've received a number of constructive suggestions on how to improve the rules. The following ideas are based on candidate feedback and conversations with other student leaders involved in the YUSU elections:

- Candidates we spoke to about the rules suggested that a more prescriptive approach would be better for students. They felt the rules should be clearer at communicating

what candidates 'can' and 'cannot do'. This year, we did develop a list of 'do's' and don'ts for candidates, but there is clearly a need to explore how we communicate the boundaries of the rules in more definitive terms. In thinking about a more prescriptive approach, we would need to consider the potential impact of a higher number of complaints and sanctions.

- All aspects of student media play a hugely important role in the delivery of the YUSU elections. This year, we built on student media involvement by giving The Lemon Press a prominent role in Debate Night, which worked really well. However, the role of the student newspapers in holding candidates to account again came up as an issue. As in previous years, to avoid the risk of student media groups appearing to endorse or denigrate candidates and influencing the outcome of elections, we promoted a strict approach to impartiality - e.g. in relation to the articles written about candidates. However, we are aware this approach can restrict the role of the student newspapers in holding candidates to account, namely, by calling out untruths and critiquing manifesto points. We are keen to explore how we can empower student media to play a stronger accountability role in future elections. This will require careful planning and dialogue with Officers, student media reps and YUSU staff, but could look something akin to national coverage of elections by the BBC, where critical reporting on candidates is permitted, as long as it is balanced.
- In a repeat of previous years, the key rules-related debates revolved around endorsements, slating and the binary between public and public social media groups. Whilst the Policy Review Group (PRG) ultimately decides on the YUSU election rules each year, we feel there is a need to check the temperature in relation to the major aspects of our election rules. Ahead of the next YUSU elections, we're keen to have wider discussions with student leaders on key questions - e.g. should we enable endorsements and should we introduce the opportunity for candidates to run on slates.