

Report from the Independent Returning Officer on the University of Leicester Students' Union Executive Elections 2024

This was the first year in which Loughborough Students' Union reciprocated the Independent Returning Officer (IRO) role for the University of Leicester Students' Union (UoLSU)'s elections. From my perspective this worked well, and I was updated regularly by Kumaran (Director of Membership Services) where I was provided with thorough details of any complaints or developments during the elections, enabling me to make and communicate any decisions effectively.

This year, the Students' Union saw an impressive turnout and hit a record number of votes with 3,569 students casting their votes for their preferred candidates, making it the highest ever turnout. Notably, this year also introduced a change in roles, with five elected officers instead of the previous six:

President: Jade Thomas

Education Officer: Sam Walter

Liberation Officer: Aishwarya Kote

Sports & Societies Officer: Ajay Reddy

Community & Wellbeing Officer: Reed James

A total of 67 queries were reported to me during my period as IRO. I am happy that these queries were resolved in an effective and timely manner by the DRO.

The queries included the following key topics:

- Pre-campaigning clarifications
- Requests for endorsements from committees
- Submitting a nomination when no longer a registered student
- Lack of initial nominations for the Liberation Officer and Trans and Non-Binary Officer Post
- Logistics of submitting a nomination fully and by the deadline
- Budget management
- Facilitating student events during voting
- Failure to meet deadlines for manifestos and election materials resulting in some candidates not being included in booklets (despite receiving extensions).
- Concerns regarding slates for which there are currently no rules against

The following queries were escalated to me for a decision rather than just for oversight:

- Lack of engagement with candidate briefings – The election rules state that *'failure to attend an Election Briefing prior to the beginning of campaigning will result in disqualification from the election.'* I took the decision that the candidates in question would be disqualified from the elections, with the right to appeal.
- Reports of candidates standing over students whilst voting and taking their phone to vote for them – The election rules state the following: *"Any reports from students that they felt as though they were pressured to vote against their true intentions will be treated extremely seriously; it is also not permitted to vote on someone else's behalf. You have to be particularly careful in this respect when students are using electronic devices ensuring that students are able to complete their vote without undue pressure."* These are very serious allegations and I am content that any reports of this nature were investigated thoroughly and dealt with accordingly. Candidates were reminded of this rule and the consequences of breaches. A number of concerns were raised but as no complaints were received directly

from students; the candidates couldn't be clearly identified; and no other corroborating evidence was available, I took the decision to not disqualify any candidates from the election.

Post-Elections Review

I recommend that the following topics are addressed as a minimum in a post-elections review in order to make improvements for next year:

- Slates
- Endorsements
- Appropriate engagement with voters
- Candidate organisation and meeting deadlines

Conclusion

I would like to give particular thanks to Kumaran for his diligent approach to the elections, his thoroughness in investigating and reporting queries and complaints, and the support he showed to me in the role as IRO; it was a pleasure to help oversee the election.

Overall, I believe that the elections announced on Friday 15th March 2024 were held in a fair manner and in accordance to the rules, with the will of the student body upheld.

Nicky Conway (Independent Returning Officer)

Director of Student Engagement
Loughborough Students' Union