




nus
**NATIONAL
CONFERENCE
2014**

8–10 April 2014 | Liverpool

**Chief Returning Officer
report
CD7**

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Key information

Purpose of this document

This document reports on the activity of the Chief Returning Officer and the Elections committee.

The Chief Returning Officer and Assistants

Honor Cohen – Chief Returning Officer

Honor Cohen is currently a Diversity Manager at a large educational solutions company. Honor is a long standing champion of the student movement and democracy, having worked in a number of roles within NUS and the Trade Union Movement. Outside of work she is the chair of the Gay Women's Network and has been a member of the management committee of her local women's refuge. Honor is a coach on NUS's We Will Lead the Way. She also has considerable experience of and interest in diversity issues and has focused a lot of effort as Chief Returning Officer into diversifying NUS' elections in order to maximise participation.

Elections committee

Colina Wright

Colina Wright is the Democracy and Representation Manager at De Montfort University. Colina is a long standing and valued member of elections committee.

Jules Mason

Jules Mason is Head of the Chief Executive's Office at Merlin, a leading international health charity. He's worked in the voluntary sector since graduating in 1997, and is a former student officer (AU Officer 96/97 and President 97/99 at Southampton Solent and NUS NEC 99/2000). Jules is currently a trustee for NCVO (which NUS is a member) and London South Bank University Students' Union.

Steve Brooks

Steve Brooks is the Director of the Electoral Reform Society in Wales, an NGO that campaigns for a better democracy. Steve was President of NUS Wales in 2001/2, and spent time working in public affairs before becoming Director of Oxfam in Wales. He's a trustee of The Bevan Foundation, a social justice think-tank.

Rachel Cashman

Rachel is Head of Collaboration and Excellence, NHS England. Rachel has worked in Parliament and in the Trade Union Sector since leaving the student movement; she has also been a trustee at the Fawcett Society. Rachel was President of Jewel and Esk Valley College Students Union, now part of Edinburgh College and was Women's Officer in NUS Scotland 1998/99 And Vice President Welfare for NUS 2000/01





Introduction from the Chief Returning officer

It is a pleasure to return elections across NUS including those at National Conference. It is my role to ensure that these elections are conducted in a fair manner in a way that maximises participation from across our membership. I hope that the candidates campaign in a way that is respectful and engaging for both voters and each other in Liverpool.

Over the last year I have worked to streamline election schedules between National Conference elections and the Liberation campaigns, as well as undertaking an initial review into how elections run across NUS as a whole, this will continue after the conference season and your feedback and ideas will be valued.

If you are a candidate, remember that voters react well to informed, responsive and accessible campaigns. If you are a delegate then please use your vote wisely and remember the students from your unions you are here to represent. I commend my report for your approval.

Best wishes and happy elections!

Honor Cohen, Chief Returning Officer





Maximising Participation

I have taken the following steps to increase participation from candidates

- Produced, in good time for the National Conference, Conference Document 11 – rules and schedules for election
- Produced a guide to the different positions available, not just at National Conference, but expanded to all major positions across the organisation
- Included a section on elections in the delegate training
- This year, we have 16 candidates running for full-time positions at National Conference.
- This year we also have 35 candidates standing for Block of 15, compared to 27 candidates running at National Conference 2013.
- We had two candidates for Disabled Students Officer, two candidates for Women's Officer and three candidates for International Students Officer.
- Recorded candidate videos and made them available on the Conference Hub.
- Held candidate hustings at Liberation conferences and allowed delegates to submit questions.

I have taken the following steps to increase participation from delegates:

- Held a candidate hustings for Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates and invited student media outlets to cover it.
- Made provision for any student to submit questions to candidates via email or Twitter.
- Agreed, with the Democratic Procedures Committee, a Presidential Candidate Question Time at National Conference
- Required all candidates to sign that they had read the guidance on accessible campaigning as part of their nominations process to reduce inaccessible campaigning that puts off delegates from voting

Increasing Diversity

Increasing diversity in NUS elections is something I have worked hard at over the last year and I am keen to improve on the good progress already made

- This year, once again, all candidates in all elections will have filled in the diversity monitoring form. This is a great improvement on previous years and allows NUS to collate information around equality and diversity to enable further steps towards widening participation

Ensuring Fairness

I have taken the following steps to ensure fairness in the elections

- Re-appointed 1 deputy returning officers and appointed three new deputy returning officers to help me make rulings and aid me in running the election procedures
- Taken measures to ensure that ballot boxes are secure and staff on ballot boxes are adequately trained

Election Rulings

At the time of writing I have been called upon to make the following Election Rulings:

- Clarified the difference between individual student membership and individual membership for the purposes of running in elections.
- Sought advice from UKCISA to rule on the eligibility of asylum seekers in the International Students Officer election.
- Ruled on the eligibility of candidates for Full Time Officer positions.
- Ruled that candidates cannot mention other candidates in their election speeches. ???
- Ruled on a late nomination at Mature and Part-Time Students Conference.

I will report on other rulings at National Conference during my report session.






Elections Review:

This year, I have started to undertake a review of elections across NUS. Whilst I will be using the elections period for National Conference 2014 as the main subject of the review, I have also returned the elections at NUS National Women's Conference, NUS Scotland and NUS Wales Conference and will also return the elections at LGBT and Black Students Conference, and I have convened a small group of officers and NEC members for their initial thoughts on elections and how we could improve the elections experience for candidates and delegates.

As such, I have taken the following actions prior to National Conference:

- Re-designed the nominations form to make it more accessible to delegates
 - Designed a dedicated area of the Conference hub to provide information on how to stand, who is standing and the election rules.
 - Allowed nominators to send nominations into NUS HQ rather than having to send nominations to candidates and then candidates having to collate them all.
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