

OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (CEC)

8 – 10 October 2021

ELECTIONS REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **Discuss** recommendations for the 2022 elections procedure.
- ii) **Recommend** for approval by Board of Trustees

1. The elections provide the Association with a number of challenges in terms of engagement and understanding. We are continuously and consistently met with low voter turnout and vacant or uncontested elections for various positions. This was highlighted as an issue in the 2018 and 2020 elections, where immediate bye-elections were required to address several vacancies, and this comes at both a cost to the Students who have periods where they are not fully represented and to the Association financially.

1.1. A small group was convened and led by VP Admin, Matt Porterfield and Director of Membership Services, Beth Metcalf, to begin the elections review early to allow plenty of time to implement changes in time for the 2022 elections. The group consists of the above along with VP Community (Anca Seaton), Student Council Member (Danielle Smith), Director of Engagement (Dan Moloney) and Head of Student Welfare and EDI (Verity Robinson).

1.2 As a group we have:

- Reviewed existing data and feedback to inform discussion and make recommendations for CEC
- Consulted the student representatives via their monthly evening session
- Raised discussion in the January CEC meeting
- Sought feedback and best practice advice from Civica (our elections provider) and from Athabasca Union and Graduate Union
- Considered the recommendations from the Governance Review

2. During our review and discussions there were two main themes

- Students don't understand what our elected officers do, and why it is important. Communications around the elected/representative team, our mission, objectives and elections must be much clearer, focused and prioritised.

- We must find ways to level the playing field to ensure that anyone with the skills or enthusiasm to get involved can find a way to engage with our democratic structures.

We are making the following recommendations and ask that the CEC support these recommendations for the 2022 elections to be implemented by an Elections Project Team.

- iii) Election rules are subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and are externally reviewed.
- iv) Role descriptions to be redefined through the appropriate process (rules revision) to ensure that individuals are not overworked, and to ensure that we are providing honest, realistic and manageable time estimations for roles.
- v) Individuals who have declared an interest in standing for election should remove themselves from discussing the design and make up of role descriptions/details for roles they are interested in where possible.
- vi) Creation of a programme of wraparound support including (not limited to): - Year-round information on elections and roles, regular candidate briefings and 1:1 support offered to each individual standing before manifestos are published.
- vii) The election dates should be set for each year to allow those interested in standing to know well in advance when elections will occur.
- viii) Removal of mandatory videos as part of the nominations process.
- ix) Guidance to be included in a resource bank showcasing different ways a student might represent themselves using a range of methods/medias.
- x) Reduction to questions asked of candidates, maximum of 5 questions.
- xi) Implement word limits for all questions.
- xii) Explore Civica's new interactive VR application for elections.
- xiii) Collect student questions throughout the elections process to allow candidates to answer these in their own time, providing opportunities for student to engage in different ways, including round table discussions and recorded or written responses.
- xiv) Being clear what everyone does and talking about it all year round.
- xv) Focusing communications to ensure that we regularly talk about our elected teams, what they do and how to get involved.
- xvi) Recommend the use of an external Returning Officer.

It is recommended that a project team similar to the makeup of the strategy project teams put these actions into practice and produce the supporting resources, networks and processes to support these improvements going forwards. It is recommended that the project team is made up of a mix of student representatives, students with limited involvement and staff members linked to the process of elections and communications.

This group will feedback to the CEC to keep them updated of progress.

Matt Porterfield
Vice President Administration

Elections Review Working Group

Beth Metcalf
Director of Membership Services