

# **Returning Officer's Report**

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*University of York Students' Union Elections 2009*

# Posts

In the Spring Term elections, electing for the 2009/10 academic year, the following posts were available:

## Full Time Officers

- Academic Affairs Officer
- Democracy & Services Officer
- President
- Sports President
- Student Activities Officer
- Welfare Officer

## Part Time Officers

- Campaigns Officer
- Disability Officer
- Entertainments Officer
- Environment & Ethics Officer
- LGBT Officer
- Racial Equality Officer
- Womens Officer
- RAG Officer
- Student Action Officer

## Other Posts

- Chair of Union Council
- 7 NUS Annual Conference Delegates

## Chronology

<b>Notice of Elections</b>	Monday Week 5
<b>Nominations Open</b>	Monday Week 6, 09:00
<b>Nominations Close</b>	Friday Week 7, 16:00
<b>Candidates Briefing Session</b>	Monday Week 8, 18:30
<b>Campaigning Begins</b>	Tuesday Week 8, 12:00
<b>Hustings</b>	Tuesday and Wednesday Week 8, 7:30 onwards
<b>Toilet Postering</b>	Permitted during Week 9
<b>Nimlock Boards</b>	During Week 9 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Voting Starts</b>	Monday Week 9, 00:01
<b>Voting Ends</b>	Friday Week 9, 23:59
<b>Calculate Results</b>	Saturday Week 9, 19:30
<b>Results Announced</b>	Saturday Week 9, 21:00 onwards

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<sup>1</sup> This was an error; the nimlock boards should have arrived in Week 8. In fact, they never arrived; refer to Problems, below.

# Candidates

Victorious candidates are highlighted in grey.

Candidates who withdrew during the election process are noted in italics.

No candidates were disqualified.

## FULL TIME OFFICERS

**Academic Affairs Officer**

**Charlie Leyland**

**Democracy & Services Officer**

**Lewis Bretts**

George Papadofragakis

David Sharp

Edward Durkin

**President**

Charles Bushby

Tom D. Langrish

**Timothy Ngwena**

Grant Bradley

**Sports President**

Gemma Johnson

**Emily Scott**

*Kath Mildon*

Michael Sneddon

Michael Leahy

**Student Activities Officer**

Ella-Grace Kirton

Rory Shanks

**Rhianna Kinchin**

**Welfare Officer**

Jennifer Coyle

**Ben Humphrys**

Matthew Pallas

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**PART TIME OFFICERS****Campaigns Officer****Chris Etheridge & Jason Rose****Disability Officer****Claire Cornock****Entertainments Officer****Sam Daniels & Suzi Ellis****Environment & Ethics Officer****David Clarke & Jade Flahive-Gilbert****LGBT Officer**

Mandi Madavo &amp; James Ball

**Elanin Vince & Peter Medley****Racial Equality Officer**

(none)

**Womens Officer****Ellie Kuper Thomas & Amal Ali****RAG Officer***Sarah Goss & Will Scobie***Helen Fry & Zoe Stones**

Iszi Chew

**Student Action Officer****Rachel Hesselwood****OTHER POSTS****NUS Annual Conference****Jamie Tyler****Tom D. Langrish**

Daniel G. Carr

**Lewis Bretts***Kath Mildon***Charlie Leyland****David Levene**

Ali Allana

**Oliver Lester****Rhianna Kinchin**

Michael Batula

**Chair of Union Council****David Levene**

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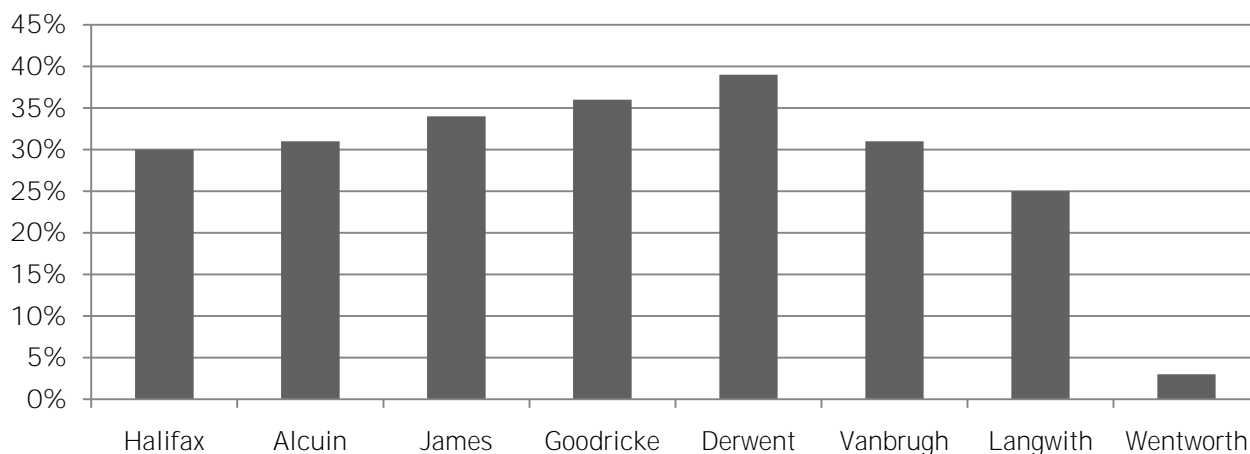
All nomination forms received were accepted. Three candidates did not provide photographs; since these were not required under election rules, a default blank picture appeared in their place on the online ballot paper.

After the nomination deadline had passed, checks revealed that one candidate was missing a seconder on their form; as this should have been noticed when they submitted their form, good faith was assumed and they were able to bring in an additional seconder to sign.

## Turnout

The total turnout was 3,485; a further breakdown follows. A high level of engagement is shown across the board; the University of York Students' Union has some of the highest turnout figures, and the most engaged students, in the country. However, some shortcomings can be noted.

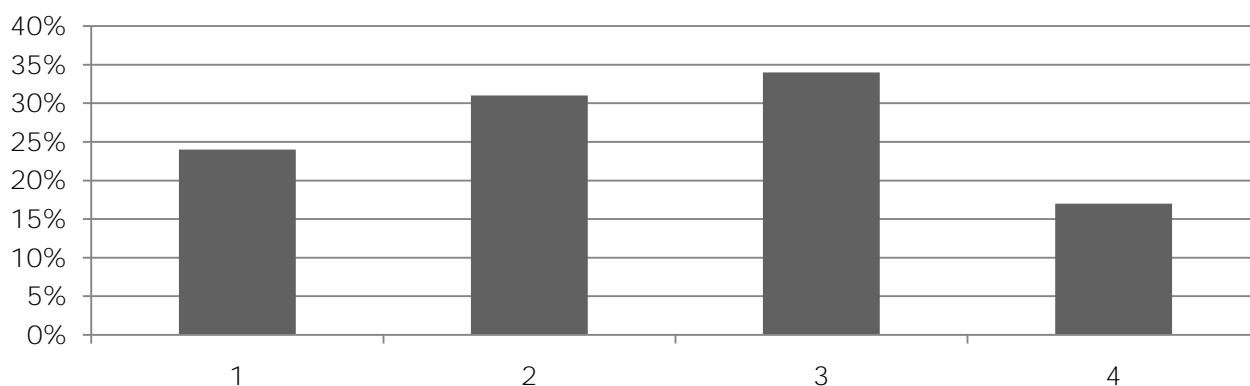
### Turnout as percentage of total college population



Engagement within mixed undergraduate and postgraduate colleges is relatively high and consistent, whereas only around 3% of the population of postgraduate Wentworth College voted. Perhaps they feel represented by the Graduate Students' Association (GSA); or perhaps, after the GSA's multiple elections this year, they are suffering election fatigue. Perhaps the mostly-undergraduate group running for positions within YUSU did not campaign to postgraduates.

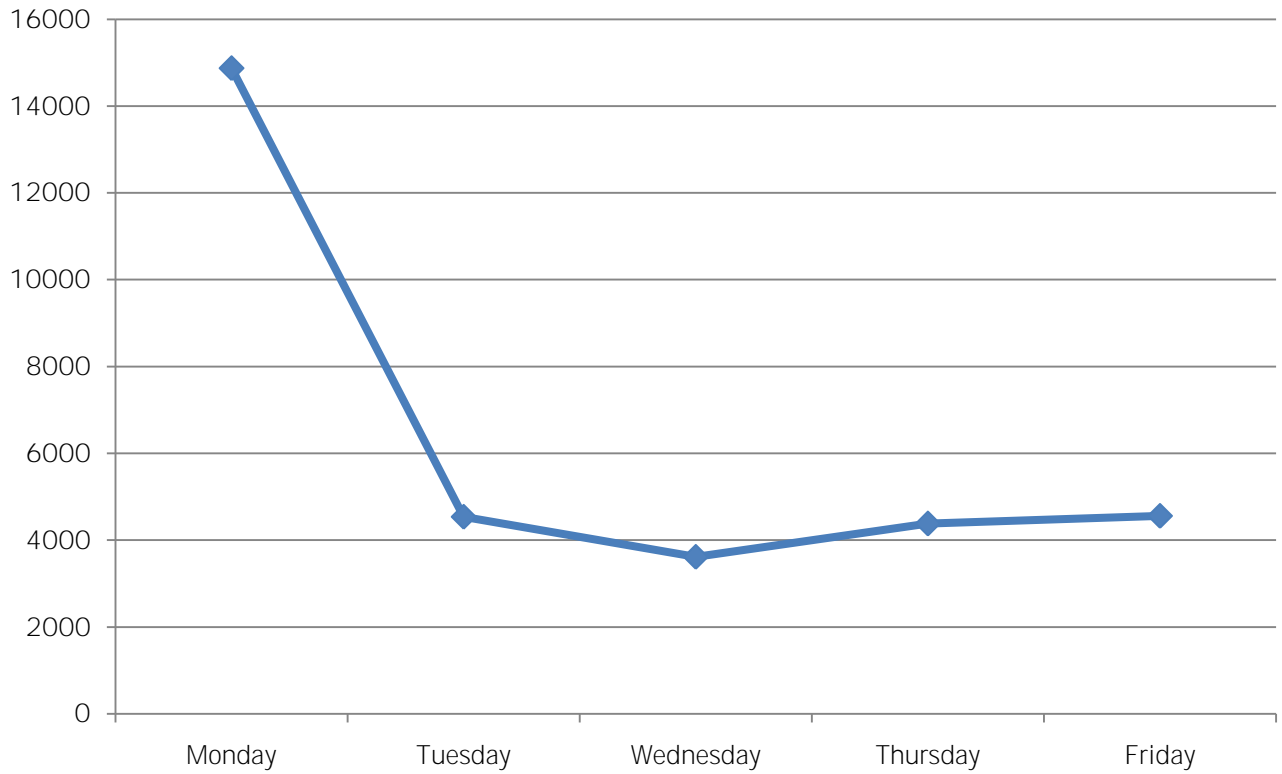
### Turnout as percentage of total year group

(where data available)



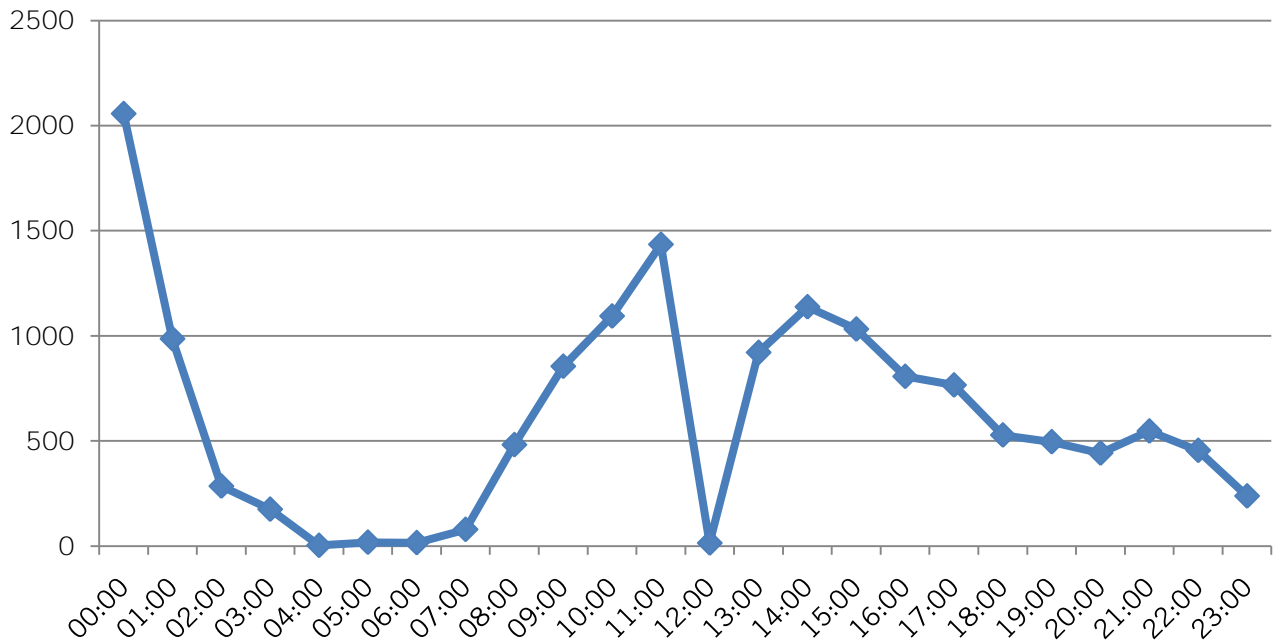
In what may be a surprising result, second and third years – those living off campus and thus away from most printed publicity – voted in greater numbers than first-years, a testament to the power of social networking, electronic campaigning and online voting. The lower percentage of fourth year voters can perhaps be attributed to the lack of those on fourth-year courses – which are in general extremely time-consuming subjects within the Sciences – running for election.

## Election turnout by date



Nearly 50% of all ballots were cast on the first day, with no statistically significant difference between voting on the other four days.

## First day voting by hour



The dip at 12 o'clock notes a technical problem – for roughly an hour, all students were unable to vote. All candidates were equally affected, and this did not affect the outcome of the election.

# Problems

## Change of RO

The original returning officer, Services and Finance Officer Matt Burton, stepped down from the post early in the election cycle owing to workload. This exposed a flaw in the current election rules and Union constitution: that there is no explicit “order of succession” for Returning Officers, and Council meets far too rarely to step in.

In this case, I took over the role of Returning Officer, which presented some logistical problems but seemed to be the best solution.

## Electronic campaigning

The rapidly expanding and changing options for electronic campaigning and social networks posed problems for both budgeting and rule enforcement. Budget-wise, a charge had to be levied from candidates’ budgets if they chose to use a private web host or domain name; and there are so many novel ways (changing your name on Facebook being one example) of campaigning online that one cannot hope to regulate for them all beforehand.

While emails are banned, text messages were not – although they could be considered chargeable from a candidate’s budget. YouTube and Twitter posed no problems this year, but they may do yet; are @replies legal under our election rules? Should they be?

## Accountability

Candidates are held responsible for the actions of their campaigners, whether those campaigners or their actions are ‘official’ or not. This leads to an interesting series of consequences: theoretically – and there is no evidence for this actually happening during these elections – someone supporting Candidate A could break the rules *on behalf of Candidate B*, causing B to be sanctioned.

In practice, this would be a difficult ‘hack’ to perform: one leak of the plan and Candidate A could potentially be disqualified, but nevertheless this is possible under our current rules.

## Multiple budgets

Candidates were able to run for two positions simultaneously: one Union officer position and one as a delegate to NUS Conference. This gave them a budget twice that of other candidates: and despite rules that said that publicity must be clearly for one position or the other – or else charged from both budgets. The question of whether publicity was “clearly for one position” caused contention towards the end of the election.

## Postering and Unconventional Publicity

As has been the case for the last few years, the staggering display of multicoloured posters around campus attracted the ire of porters, facilities managers and other university administrators: there is no strict agreement as to where postering is acceptable during elections, and who is responsible for ensuring that candidates follow the rules.

Multiple candidates were contacted by facilities managers after defacing university buildings with stickers – one candidate was led around the library with a can of solvent after one of his supporters was overly enthusiastic with their stickering.

The rules also refer to “publicity”, with reference only to mass printed material, in several areas. This could have led to confusion, but a briefing note early on made the difference between “publicity” and more creative campaigning clear.

#### Keycard access

The most contentious point early in the election cycle was that of keycard access: during the candidates’ briefing on the day before campaigning began, it was noted that some candidates, but not all, would have access to JCRC all-kitchen keycards. The Returning Officer took the decision to restrict candidates and their supporters from entering and postering unattended kitchens: first, to avoid some candidates having a startling advantage over others due to their JCRC connections – and second, to bring the elections in line with security concerns expressed by the university and college teams.

This proved very contentious: some college chairs supported it, some opposed it; I was told that one candidate was “baying for [my] blood”. Since it was available (but not announced) in previous elections, the fact that keycard access would be available was assumed in candidates’ election campaigns – and the fact that it was no longer available was, in many cases, a surprising change.

#### Nimlock boards

Due to a clerical error in the previous months, the nimlock boards for elections, normally placed in all porters’ lodges and other locations, never arrived.

#### Publicity approval

Candidates were unsure which publicity had to be given to the Returning Officer for approval; paper posters only? All text appearing online? Somewhere in between?

#### Campaigning in Union buildings

While campaigning in Union buildings is traditionally off limits, this is not spelled out anywhere in the rules; and, until a message was sent out by the Returning Officer, it was unclear as to whether this also applied to the Courtyard. This should be made explicit in future.

#### Media equality

While all campus media organisations attempt to stay independent and neutral – and liaised well on any contentious articles – there were still times when articles or videos about candidates were released at different times, or the order of release meant that one candidate was given significantly greater placement. While, in my view, none of these incidents materially affected the result, it would be advantageous to have a formal policy and guidelines for media neutrality.

#### Other queries

One voter complained that the system had marked them as already voting for President. The most likely explanation was that they had left themselves logged in on a shared computer and another user had placed that vote; assuming good faith, perhaps the vote caster thought they were logged in as themselves.

# Election Breaches and Sanctions

Bushby: Facebook group

One candidate was sanctioned: Charles Bushby was issued with a five-hour ban after a mass Facebook message, from an unrelated group, was sent advertising his campaign. The sanction was intended to redress the balance of the advantage gained by the message, and was not viewed as punitive.

Breaches insufficient to merit sanctions

Many posters were found out-of-place during the election cycle: early postering in toilets, printed publicity placed outdoors, posters stapled to walls and so on. None of these were egregious enough to merit sanctions, but by the end of the elections many candidates were warned. Again, the problem here is that candidates are responsible for their campaigners and campaigning, *even if it's not done officially*. There were also allegations of campaigners interfering with rival candidates' publicity – difficult to prove given that it's impossible to legislate for Acts of Porter or Acts of Drunk Student.

## Recommendations

This report is intended to spark a wide review of the YUSU elections rules and regulations. While overall, union elections have been a great success – with our turnout figures comparing extremely favourably with all comparable institutions – the rules and regulations have not been fully reviewed for many years, merely patched up from one year to the next.

Issues like electronic campaigning, the shorter news cycle, and the ability of full-time officers to run for a second time require a thorough look at how Union elections are run.

Nevertheless, there were no serious problems with this series of elections, and I am happy to certify their results.

Tom Scott  
Returning Officer, 2009 Elections  
University of York Students' Union