



Deputy Returning Officer Report

Preamble

NUS (National Union of Students) has appointed [Civica Election Services](#) (CES) as the new Chief Returning Officer (CRO) for its upcoming election's season, which will see the appointment of seven full-time officers and 24 voluntary roles. The CRO will act as an independent source of appeal with power to make final rulings on any matters arising through NUS' elections.

Formerly known as Electoral Reform Services, CES is the UK's leading provider of election services, with over 100 years' experience of administering elections, ballots and consultation processes. CES work with over 75% of the UK's local authorities, providing electoral registration services and helping them to administer local and general elections.

Kathy Wylde has been appointed as the Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) and will be responsible for the practical running of the elections, including confirming nominations and deciding on candidate eligibility, making rulings on complaints and overseeing the count. Kathy has more than 20 years' experience in the education sector including senior positions at Wirral Metropolitan College Students' Union and is a long-time volunteer with NUS sitting on the Elections Committee since 2015.

Following decisions made by more than 700 students at National Conference 2019, NUS has reformed its democratic processes to be simpler, more transparent and truly student-led. This year's Conferences will look and feel different with all five NUS Conferences showcasing different elements of the new approach between February and May.

Amongst the major changes is a new online voting system for officer elections, online hustings and much more time ahead of the conference for voters to interact with the candidates.

NUS National President, Zamzam Ibrahim, said:

"This is an exciting time for NUS as we make our biggest democratic reforms in half a century. We're trailblazing a different kind of student politics and want to be a model for how a genuinely powerful democracy can work to make real change happen."

"We're making significant changes because we want to put members back in control of their national organisation. It's important that every single student who engages with us believes in the democratic process and feels confident that their voice is being heard. The reassurance provided by the new Chief and Deputy Returning Officer appointments will help us further deliver on this pledge."



Introduction from Kathy Wylde, Deputy Returning Officer

Hi, my name is Kathy Wylde and I am your Deputy Returning Officer.

This is a transition year for the National Union of Students, we have run the first two online elections at both NUS Wales Conference and NUS Scotland Conference. They were successful which gives me confidence, especially in the current climate as all of National Conference 2020 will be done on line.

This year's National Conference comes in the middle of the global Covid-19 pandemic. The circumstances in which we hold the conference are unprecedented. I am glad that we are still able to hold free and fair elections. I know you will be disappointed not to meet the candidates face to face, but please take the time to find out about them online.



Anyway, by now you should have received a unique link to enable you to fully participate in the upcoming conference elections. We ran a hustings event with all the candidates and you can view this all online. I have to say, in all my time at NUS this was one of the best hustings I've ever seen. We had some really interesting questions from you and the candidates answered them really well. It's a great opportunity to find out what each candidate believes and how they want to lead NUS. You will be able to view the candidates' hustings at <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/national-conference/elections-and-candidates/online-hustings>

Please use your vote, it is important. This will ensure that you have a NUS Leadership who can take the National Union forward. Finally, I would like to wish all the candidates good luck, and all being well the next time you hear from me will be with the election result.

Stay safe.

Kathy (and Dave the dog)

Delivering Reform to our Democracy

Last year National Conference passed extensive reforms, paving the way to make changes to how we do our democracy. If you read the Democratic Procedures Committee, you will see the many changes and new processes that have been made to the policy making side of democracy. For elections, delivering reforms has been easier, as last year we had already made steps to changing how we run elections.

There are some clear takeaways from National Conference 2019 with regards to the reform of democracy. These are:

- Democracy needs simplifying
- Elections should be separate from policy making
- Pre and post conference ballots should be used to clarify where there is consensus
- Voting should be open to members through digital technology
- Technical detail should be introduced to discussions
- Cross campus ballots and gender balanced delegations should be retained
- A clear role for the Democratic Procedures Committee in setting and steering procedures.

You can read about a lot of these in the DPC report, however we wanted to focus some attention onto the changes we have made to elections around simplification, separating elections from policy making and using more digital technology.



Democracy Needs Simplifying

The biggest step we have taken to simplify our democracy is to simplify our election rules. The new rules now reflect the guidance that NUS issues to Students' Unions in setting their election rules. This is based on the work of the [NUS Elections Commission](#) and sets out a series of core rules that candidates must abide by. The rules and how we approach elections are based on the core principles of:

- We aim to elect people in a free and fair manner
- Elections are the mechanism for our members to choose their representatives
- Wherever possible the electorate should always decide/be the decision makers
- We are not here to give everyone an equal chance of winning, just a fair one

We've also included a much stronger rule around anti-racism, to ensure that candidates and our future leaders are being held to the highest standards in this regard. Specifically, we have taken on board the motions passed at last year's conference addressing Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Elections should be separate from policy making

This was a clear ask from members last year and a really positive piece of feedback from National Conference 2019. We've worked with the DPC to set a timetable that means elections happen before we move into policy making. Online voting for candidates makes this much easier to achieve.

Voting should be open to members through digital technology

This was one of the key asks from reform and one which we are pleased to say we are delivering on. Online voting had been tested previously and was used for voluntary position elections at last year's National Conference. For the first time NUS Full Time Officers have been elected online with the first officer elected in this way being Eden Ladley (in last year's election of Trans Officer which took place after the conference).

This year however we have rolled this out so that 100% of NUS elections take place online. We've run online elections at NUS Wales and Scotland Conference and arrangements are in place for upcoming conferences.

We've been working on ways of getting information out to voters remotely so that they can vote online knowing about the candidates and what they stand for. Every candidate has information up online both on the NUS Connect website and within the voting panel itself (so when casting your vote, you can read each candidate's manifesto).

The biggest single step we have taken to providing better online information to voters is through online hustings. This was run in NUS Scotland with good participation. NUS Wales hustings took place at the conference due to the reopening of nominations at the event.

For National Conference we ran an online hustings in partnership with [MediaFirst](#), hosted by Channel 4 News and ITV News editor Keme Nzerem. As I said in the introduction I was delighted by the quality of debate in this hustings session and for the questions which were submitted by you. In total we received 73 questions from students across the country. Over 20 topics were covered with many emphasising campaigning, building relationships, inclusion and leadership. Again, I would strongly urge all voters to view these hustings online before casting your votes. They can be found at <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/national-conference/elections-and-candidates/online-hustings>

