

3 Starting up an FE SU: Elections

It is really important that the student officers in the SU are elected into their roles so they are democratic representatives of the student body. When looking at running an election for these posts it is easy to get overwhelmed – the best elections are the ones that stick to the basic principles of a free, fair, and accessible way of expressing an opinion – if you focus on delivering these principles you are unlikely to go wrong.

Why should you do this

By running an election, you are giving your student body the choice in how they want to be represented. It gives students the knowledge and understanding that they have power in their SU and fosters involvement in it. By running elections for officer positions, you are also fulfilling regulatory obligations that your institution needs to meet in accordance with the Education Act (1994)(not valid in Northern Ireland). You may also want to make your college aware that you are running elections – this could also help encourage students to engage.

How to

- **When** - When will your election take place? You'll need to set a timetable for your whole elections process including when and how people can nominate themselves for election, when the voting takes place, when the election results are counted and finally, when results are announced. Publicise details of the election well in advance.
- **How** – How will you run the election? You'll need to start with infrastructure of your election. You'll need to decide what electoral system you will use – check out our [elections guidance](#) explaining different types voting systems. Will the election take place digitally and if so, what method will you use? You may want to look at [unioncloud](#).
- **People** - Think about what support or training you'll provide to candidates including accessibility of being a candidate in your elections. Think about how you can provide opportunities for candidates to share their manifestos e.g. a hustings, a poster board or through social media or learning platforms.
- **Engagement** - During the voting period think about different things you can do to increase numbers of students voting – are you running promotional activities on all campuses? Are you communicating to students who study outside of core hours? Think about how your candidates will be able to communicate to the voters so the electorate is as informed about their choice as possible.
- **Ask questions** – Students' unions across the UK run elections and will always be coming up with new and innovative ways of running elections and engaging with students. Learning lessons from years past. Make sure to utilise [Workplace](#) if you have any questions or would like to find out a bit more about what others do in their elections.

NUS Elections Service

NUS Charity's free elections service ensures your elections are free and fair with our election returns and processes to support your deputy returning officer (the person running the election on the ground).

Using insight and sharing good practice you can draw on decades of experience in running students' union elections, and someone will always be at hand to answer any questions you have, or to advise if something comes up.

NUS' support also gives an assurance to parent institutions that their regulatory obligations are being met in accordance with the Education Act (1994). We also collect and collate candidate demographic information as part of commitment to making students' unions inclusive for all students. You can find out more [here](#) including how to register for the service.

Next steps – How to grow from here

- After every election cycle, make sure to evaluate how the election has gone. You can use this as the basis for making changes to your election process going forward.
- Remember there isn't a perfect way of running elections – use trial and error to improve your process.
- Use the [Deputy Returning Officers group on NUS Workplace](#) to ask questions and share ideas
- Sign up to the [NUS Charity Elections Service](#) before your elections period and check out all of the free resources.