Imperial College Union
Board of Trustees / May 2025

Deputy Returning Officer Report – Leadership Elections 2025

Author(s): Cat Turhan (Director of Membership Services and Deputy Returning Officer)

Purpose: To present the Deputy Returning Officer Leadership Election 2025 summary report.

Decision(s): Board is asked to **recommend** the report to University Council - the body that is required by the Education Act 1994 to satisfy itself that the Union's elections for major union offices have been fairly and properly conducted.

1. Summary of Election and Results

The Union delivered an in-person Leadership Election, which was run concurrently with CSP committee elections.

1.1 Key statistics

- This election saw 2201 candidates stand for election, with 181176 votes cast by students
- Aggregate turnout for the elections was 34.2%, a 4.1 percentage point increase from last year
- The turnout for the leadership election was 25%, an increase of 4 percentage points
- The turnout for the Club, Society, and Project (CSP) election was 33.6%, a 1.9 percentage point increase from last year
- There were 14 candidates across the Officer Trustee Positions
- There were 278 candidates across the 139 leadership positions (128 with candidates).
- There were 3988 candidacies across the 2852 CSP positions
- The Union received 101 complaints during the course of the election period. This is a marked increase from last year's cycle, which resulted in 68 complaints. The majority of complaints affected the CSP elections

1.2 Purpose of the elections

Between February 2025 and 14th March 205, Imperial College Union held its annual leadership elections. The process sought to elect 2752 positions (135 leadership roles, 2617 CSP positions).

- Five Full Time Officer Positions, including President, Deputy President (DP) Clubs and Societies, DP Education, DP Welfare, and the Imperial College School of Medicine Students' Union (ICMSU) President
- Council Chair
- Two Elected Student Trustees
- Postgraduate Representation Chair (Research)
- Academic and Welfare Officers (Postgraduate positions)
- Constituent Union Executive Committee Positions
- Liberation and Community Officer Positions
- Academic and Wellbeing Representatives
- 2852 CSP Committee Positions

The DP Finance and Services role was not included in this election, pending the outcome of the democracy review.

1.3 Summary of Results

The results can be found online. The following positions were successfully elected:

- Five Full Time Officer Positions
- Council Chair
- Two Elected Student Trustees
- Postgraduate Representation Chair (Research)
- 2/4 Academic and Welfare Officers (Postgraduate positions)
- All Liberation and Community Officer Positions
- Constituent Union Executive Committee Positions (including every Presidential position)
- Academic and Wellbeing Representatives
- CSP Committee Positions

The results for the elected Trustee positions:

Position	**Winner**
President	Nico Henry
DP Education	Emina Hogas
DP Welfare	Anson To
DP Clubs and Societies	Tom Gordon
Student Trustees	Yasmin Baker and Basit Khan
Council Chair	Anthea MacIntosh-LaRocque
ICSMSU President	Sarah Azam – *not a trustee position but a full-time role*

2. Elections objectives

Delivering this major democratic process is aligned with the Union's goal of effective advocacy and influence, and the key enabler of strong and accessible democracy.

The overall operational objective of the election was to deliver to ensure that every student can participate freely and accessibly in the leadership election.

3. Election Support

The Returning Officer (RO) holds responsibility for advising the DRO on serious breaches of the election rules. The RO for this election was Lucy Gill (Director of Membership Services, University of Nottingham Students' Union). It is asked that the Board formally thank Lucy for her support in these elections.

The Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) was responsible for deciding on any matter relating to the conduct of the election. This includes the power to penalise or exclude candidates in respect of any breach of election regulations. The DRO for these elections was Cat Turhan.

The Elections Working Group was responsible for planning and delivering all operational aspects of the election, in line with the decisions of the Returning and Deputy Returning Officer. The Elections Working Group was led by Helena Schofield (Representation Manager), and comprised of:
Maks Andrzejewski
Charlotte Baker
Zahra Butt

Nicole Carmeni
Ailis Fahim
Robert Fenner
Juliette Guillot
Ruben Kretek
Hema Magad
Roberto Sorrentino
Phil Stewart
Vinesha Veramami

The DRO would like to thank all staff for their hard work to deliver these elections – in particular, Helena Schofield who oversaw this successful period.

4. Engagement and support strategies

This year, the team delivered a number of engagement strategies to drive turnout and interact with students positively with union democracy. Events were held at three of the College campuses and online. These include:

- **Outreach events** at South Kensington, Hammersmith, and White City for students who may be interested in becoming a candidate.
- A **digital hustings** for the officer trustee positions (in collaboration with Felix).
- **Voter stalls** to answer questions and prizes for students who could demonstrate proof of voting at South Kensington, Hammersmith and White City. A candidate booklet was also provided to empower students to make informed choices before voting.
- A **candidate roadshow** for the Officer Trustees, Constituent Union Presidents, liberation and community roles, and faculty/department reps, as well as an opportunity to take up a 'soapbox slot' on Queen's lawn.

There was also a renewed focus on candidate wellbeing and support, with a number of new or improved initiatives:

- Candidates were invited to **breakfasts** at the beginning of each voting day, to ensure they had eaten well.
- The elections team held a **debrief session** at the end of voting period to ensure candidates could relax and raise any questions about the process.
- Consideration was given to international students

100% of surveyed candidates said rated the elections support either a 4 or a 5/5.

5. Voter turnout

Overall, ICU delivered an increase to the aggregate turnout of the elections of 34.2%:

Study Type	**Voters**	**Electorate**	**Turnout**
Undergraduate (UG)	7154	13081	54.7%
Postgraduate Taught (PGT)	927	6761	13.7%
Postgraduate Research (PGR)	471	5173	9.1%
All PG	1398	11934	11.7%
Total	8552	25015	34.2%

UG aggregate turnout is the highest since 2022 (54.73%) and, given the student population is higher now than it was then, it represents the highest absolute number of undergraduates to have voted in the Leadership Elections.

However, issues around PG voter turnout persist – particularly with respect to PGR turnout. The Democracy review has highlighted some holistic concerns with postgraduate engagement with the students' union, and recommended changes to the democratic structure may support this to improve (subject to Council and Board approval).

The table below demonstrates year on year change for the leadership elections

	Total		
Year	**Voters**	**Electorate**	**% Turnout**
2020	6104	20641	30%
2021	6212	22822	27%
2022	7108	23711	30%
2023	5541	24411	23%
2024	5402	24814	22%
2025	6249	25015	25%

6. Candidates

Position	**2025 Candidates**	**2024 Candidates**	**2023 Candidates**	**2022 Candidates**	**2021 Candidates**	**2020 Candidates**
President	7	6	4	6	3	5
Deputy President Education	2	1	5	4	2	2
Deputy President Welfare	1	4	2	3	2	3
Deputy President Clubs & Societies	4	2	2	4	4	2
Deputy President Finance & Services	N/A	2	3	2	2	2
Total	14	15	16	19	13	14

All Officer trustee roles in this election were contested, excluding the DP Welfare. Although a reason for this has not been clarified, two candidates withdrew during the nominations period.

In terms of demographics, 45% of candidates in the leadership elections were women, and 48% were international students. Efforts were made to ensure the nominations period was marketed to international students, with promotion developed in both English and Mandarin.

7. CSP Elections

The Union ran CSP elections concurrently with the main elections. This year 2899 positions were available in the election. This election saw 6301 voters, which represents a 33.6% turnout (over 5 percentage point increase). Positions that were not filled in this cycle will be run in the Summer Election 2025.

8. Election Rules and Incidents

The Education Act 1994 Section 22 Clause 2 states that:
(d) appointment to major union offices should be by election in a secret ballot in which all members are entitled to vote;
(e) the governing body should satisfy themselves that the elections are fairly and properly conducted;

Imperial College Union also holds democracy and accountability as key organisational values. The Union has a legal duty and moral imperative to run free and fair elections for all candidates. The Election Rules were approved in advance by the Board and were in line with the Union constitution and Bye Law J for Major Elections, with some changes made in advance of these elections.

All candidates running for both Leadership and CSP positions were mandated to agree to these rules upon submitting a nomination, and rules were published in the candidate pack. They were also required to attend in-person briefing or an online briefing (with a short quiz) prior to campaigning which covered the rules and acceptable tactics. Approximately 35% of candidates running in the leadership elections attended an in-person or online briefing, including all active officer trustee candidates. 13% of CSP election candidates (287 students) attended the candidate briefing online, and a transcript and recording were circulated to every attendee.

Last year, there were 68 complaints made across both elections. The 2025 leadership election cycle represents a marked increase in complaints, building on increases in 2024.

8.1 Complaints Overview

In total, the Deputy Returning Officer and Returning Officer received 101 complaints by the deadline (which was 17:00 13th March):

	Total complaints	Not upheld	Warnings issued	Suspensions issued
Leadership Elections	23	14	8	1
Club, Society, Project (CSP)	78	29	48	1

No candidates were disqualified from the election.

A potential reason for the high volume of complaints is the rewording of the rules to be more succinct and students were getting used to them. Next year, team will look closely at the rules for candidates running in both sets of elections and look to make a distinct and proportional set of rules for both types of candidates. This is to prevent CSP elections from being more contentious than necessary within the context of a free and fair elections. The Union will also look to build out a new complaints' app, as the team were inhibited by some unavoidable tech issues.

9. Conclusion

In line with the requirement in the Education Act (1994), both the Union-wide and group elections were administered in a free and fair manner. Actions undertaken by the Deputy Returning Officer, Returning Officer, and Governance and Membership Committee were in line with their authority as delegated by the Board to oversee and ensure the integrity of the Union's democratic process.