UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION
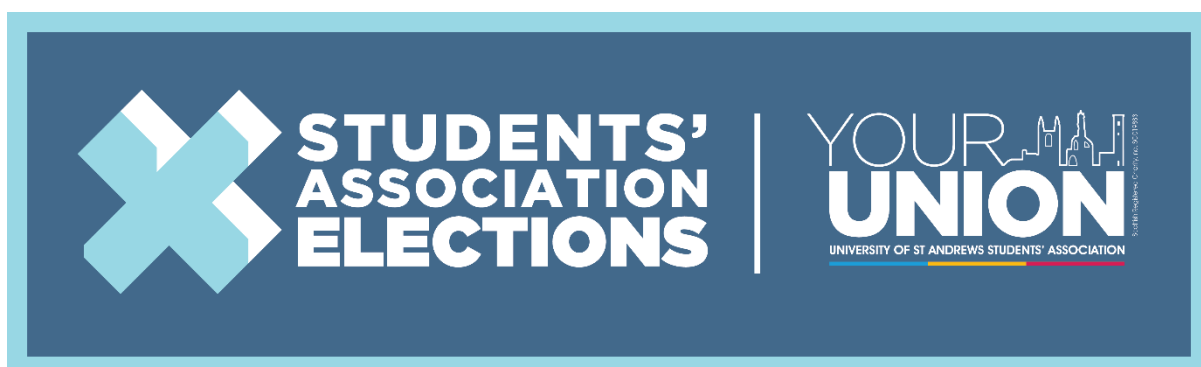
General Elections Report 2023

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Introduction

In our second year of staff-run Elections, we are pleased to report the first increase in voter turnout since 2018 (and the second increase in turnout for the last ten years). Two student Elections Organisers were added to this year's staff Elections Team and other members included: Academic Representation Co-Ordinator (Lead; Deputy Returning Officer); Human Resources Manager (Deputy Returning Officer); the Design and Marketing Assistants; the Management Accountant/Deputy General Manager; and the Councils and Academic Representation Interns (student staff). Our Returning Officer (appointed by Governance, Nominations, and Staffing) was Scott Quinn from Edinburgh University Students' Association.

Though overall turnout saw a marginal increase, many other key statistics (such as candidate numbers and contested races) decreased year-on-year. While turnout and candidate numbers remain impressively high by (anecdotal) comparison to other Students' Associations, it is clear from the data that sustained engagement in elections is still very much at risk.

Utilising the 2022 Report, the Elections Staff made several changes to improve engagement. A remodelled "Hustings" schedule was introduced, splitting the single, longform event into three smaller events based on interest areas. Elections Staff made in person appearances in classrooms, societies, and other student spaces to drive candidate and voting turnout. Finally, additional guidance to candidates (and the candidates' individual enthusiasm) resulted in a significant return to in-person campaigning.

Only two Postgraduate Student Representative Council Positions and two Language Convenor positions went unfilled during the General Election. The latter two positions were filled by a co-option and an extraordinary by-election, while the former two positions are being filled by co-option (ongoing at the time of the report). No referenda or ballot initiatives were proposed in 2023.

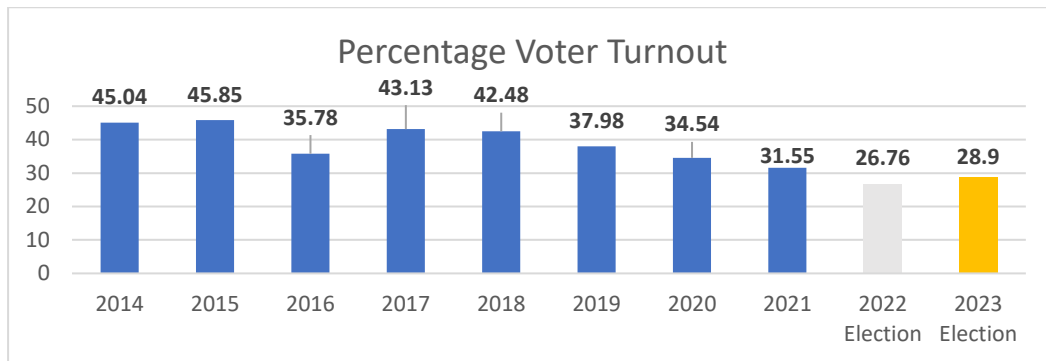Finally, the 2023 Elections adhered to the following timeline:

- 22 February to 7 March – Nominations Open
- 8 March to 13 March – Town Hall and Debate Period (+ Campaigning Open)
- 14 and 15 March – Voting Open

The following report, prepared by the Staff Elections Lead and the Elections Organisers, details the major achievements, challenges, and outcomes of the 2023 Elections.

Statistical Summary

The section below covers the highlighted statistics on turnout, candidate numbers, and contested positions for the General Elections.

Overall election turnout increased by 2.14% from the previous academic year.

Percentage Voter Turnout

Year	Turnout
2014	45.04
2015	45.85
2016	35.78
2017	43.13
2018	42.48
2019	37.98
2020	34.54
2021	31.55
2022 Election	26.76
2023 Election	28.9

The total number of unique voters rose by 9% between last academic year and 2022/23.

Number of Unique Voters

2022 Election	2023 Election	Numerical Difference
3139	3409	+270

The total number of candidates decreased slightly from the 2022 Election, with 13% fewer nominations overall.

Overall Candidates

2022 Election	2023 Election	Numerical Difference
113	100	-13

The percentage of contested posts decreased considerably over the previous academic year, going from 62% in 2022 down to 46% in 2023.

Contested Posts 2023

Contested: 27
Uncontested: 32

- Contested
- Uncontested

Contested Posts 2022

Contested: 35
Uncontested: 21
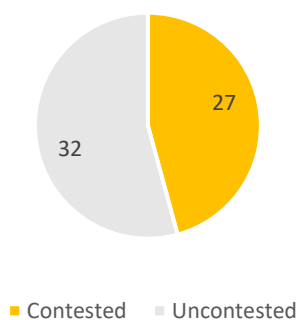
- Contested
- Uncontested
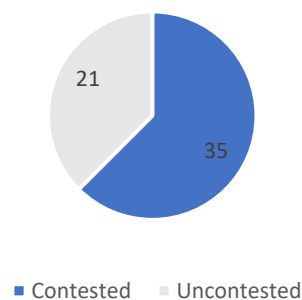
Overall Turnout

Statistics

Elections on the Portal were separated by content area, with the following **numbers of total (nonunique) votes** cast:

Sabbs + SRC + School Presidents	Trustees	Charities	Total Number of Votes (nonunique)
3191	1220	932	5,343

As a reminder, the total number of unique student voters was 3,409. Due to slightly different ballot configurations, an exact comparison of these categories between years is not readily available. (Trustees were up 436 votes from last academic year and Charities were down 57 votes from last academic year).

The average number of **votes per post** rose very slightly by 1.73 votes. While this is only a marginal increase, this number may be the most accurate way of gauging participation between academic years, given that the metric accounts for structural changes to Students' Association positions (i.e. changes to which/how many posts are elected each year).

Average Votes Per Post

2022 Election	2023 Election	Numerical Difference	% Difference
56.05	57.78	+1.73	+0.03

A comparison of **voting in Sabbatical Races** between 2023 and 2022 shows a significant increase in engagement (especially in the Association President Race).

Voting in Sabbatical Races

	Assoc. Pres	AU Pres	DoEd	DoES	DoSDA	DoWell
2022 Election	1393	1156	0 (735 in By-Election)	1211	1006	1206
2023 Election	2295	1766	1441	1403	1367	1510
Difference	+ 902	+610	+706	+102	+361	+304

Turnout Analysis

Election Organisers (Student Staff)

The addition of two Election Organisers for the 2023 Student Elections was essential in driving voter turnout and engagement. The Organisers not only managed election responsibilities, but also provided a unique student perspective and approach on events and initiatives. Having two dedicated staff members rather than a volunteer group allowed for the greater efficiency in decision making essential to the successful implementation of new projects and events leading up to the election. However, having a group of volunteers was still very much needed especially with tabling and events.

Additionally, the Elections Organisers' background in political organizing and campaigning allowed for more effective facilitation and coordination of campaigns. Specifically, this assisted in the approach to messaging surrounding the elections and for candidate supports in the return to visible campaigning. The Organisers focused on social media outreach through various student-dominated platforms and was successful in reaching target demographics. They also devoted a significant amount of time to in-person outreach by attending lectures and society meetings and providing information about the student elections.

The Elections Organisers were irreplaceable in our effort to increase voter turnout.

Return of Visible Campaigning

The return to visible campaigning was successful in engaging the student body and was another important factor driving up voting turnout. Candidates that visibly campaigned did so appropriately and responsibly. It was apparent that many student voters engaged with the visible campaigning in terms of conversations, baked goods, and small printed materials. In conversations with student voters, it was clear that the return to visible campaigning inspired more conversations and awareness about the student elections. With the Election Organisers placed in key areas around town, students were essentially able to put a face to the name and get to understand the Elections process through one-on-one interactions. During election days, candidates were strategically located near hubs of student life such as the Student Union and the library. This year, we also saw candidates put together small campaign teams to aid in promotional efforts. The importance of having candidates engage with the student community cannot be understanded, especially post-covid.

Numerous candidates invested in physical campaign materials such as posters or flyers, which were distributed to students or placed around town. The decision to allow small, printed materials to be handed out ended up having very little environmental impact and made it easier for candidates to campaign.

Pledge to Vote Campaign

The Elections Team introduced a Pledge to Vote Campaign, where students could promise to vote and in exchange were entered to win a guided day tour courtesy of St Andrews Shuttle. 484 students pledged to vote and were sent a reminder email the day before and of voting.

Aspects of this campaign were effective and produced great results. For instance, asking students to Pledge to Vote incentivised early action from voters in the months of January/February. (Previously, there was little to do other than prepare a nomination statement, and nothing to do if you didn't want to run). The prize was also well received, and St Andrews Shuttle gave the Students' Association a discounted tour in exchange for advertising. An email reminder to students also may have helped with voting turnout.

On the negatives, however, Pledge to Vote numbers fell far short of the 1,000 signature goal we set out at the beginning. The prize (while appreciated) was difficult to explain in a short, snappy sentence and it was often difficult to get students to Pledge to Vote using a QR code (in classrooms or at tables).

Turnout Incentives for Student Representative Council (SRC) and School Presidents

This year, the Elections Team allocated a prize to the outgoing SRC Officer whose role received the highest percentage voter turnout (as well as the runner up). The same prize was awarded to the top School President/Language Convenor and the runner up. This incentive seemed to have little effect on voter turnout, as the highest scoring SRC Officers were those alphabetically toward the top of the voting list (Arts & Divinity Faculty President and Disability Officer).

On the School side, the results were more mixed. Physics & Astronomy had the highest percentage voter turnout, which is in-line with past years' trends. The School of Medicine was the runner up, however, and more than doubled their voter turnout from the previous year. It is therefore difficult to draw a definite conclusion regarding the effectiveness of this incentive.

Other Factors

Several high-profile Sabbatical and Student Representative Council races seemed to have a significant effect on turnout. A decrease in the School President and Language Convenor races may have diminished potential turnout growth, and additional resourcing and efforts may be helpful in that area. Future collaboration with the different Schools and Language departments can allow for more nominations and better turnout and engagement within these specific races.

Future Actions

There are a number of other efforts that the Staff Elections Team (and student officers and others) could implement in future elections in an effort to increase the overall turnout, detailed below:

- Hire Elections Organisers for future Elections Cycles and explore the possibility of increasing the number of these roles (to three or four positions).
- Continue to expand non-representational staff's participation in Elections (involving bar and café staff as well as administrative and publicity support from other Union employees).
- Increased budgeting for events to allow for more events that accommodate more students.
- Combine all Elections Ballots to one voting platform. (E.g. after the close of nominations, move the Trustee candidates manually to a new category within the General Election and add the Charities as a category as well. This will create a single, unified ballot).
- Continue with the Pledge to Vote campaign, perhaps strengthening presence at Students' Association events, and introduce the option for paper sign ups/signatures.
- Expand and continue the "Pledge to Vote" video campaign on social media, and extend the opportunity to do a video to all candidates.
- Continue to allow candidates to use/distribute small printed materials (e.g. flyers) in campaigning efforts.

Positions and Candidates

Statistics

The total number of candidates across all posts/positions dropped by a very slim margin between this year's and last year's Elections.

Total Number of Candidates (All Posts)

2022 Election	2023 Election	Numerical Difference	% Difference
113	100	-13	-13%

Similarly, the number of candidates per post available decreased significantly from the previous academic year. (There were 56 posts available in 2022 compared to 59 posts available in 2023).

Candidates Per Post

2022 Election	2023 Election	Numerical Difference	% Difference
2.02	1.69	-0.32	-16%

This year, we saw fewer withdrawn nominations: just nine (9) compared to the 15 withdrawals in 2022. Crucially, there were no Sabbatical Officer withdrawals during the 2023 Elections.
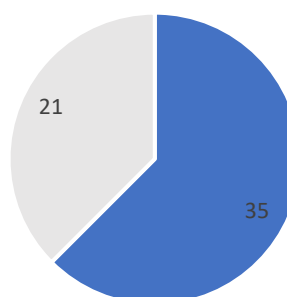
On the whole, our percentage of contested races decreased compared to last year's elections going from 62% in 2022 down to 46% in 2023.

Contested Posts 2023

27 Contested, 32 Uncontested

■ Contested ■ Uncontested
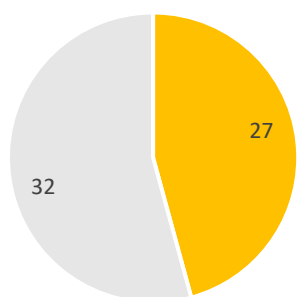
Contested Posts 2022

35 Contested, 21 Uncontested

■ Contested ■ Uncontested

Sabbatical Officer Races

The total number of Sabbatical Candidates rose from 9 in 2022 to 11 candidates this year's elections (a 22% increase).

Sabb Candidates by Position (2022)						
	Assoc. Pres	AU Pres	DoEd	DoES	DoSDA	DoWell
2023 Election	3	2	1	1	1	3

The total percentage of Sabbatical races that were contested decreased to 50% this year from 66% in 2022.

Student Representative Council Races

The total number of SRC Candidates rose very slightly from the previous election. Compared to 33 candidates in the 2022 Elections, there were 35 candidates in this year's Elections, a 6% increase. (It is worth noting that two additional positions were on the ballot in 2023 compared to 2022, making our engagement more-or-less flat).

| Role	Number of Candidates
Accommodation Officer	1
Alumni Officer	1
Arts and Divinity Faculty President	2
Association Chair	3
BAME Officer	3
Charities Officer	1
Community Relations Officer	1
Disability Officer	2
Employability Officer	1
Environment Officer	1
Gender Equality Officer	1
International Students' Officer	6
LGBT+ Officer	1
Lifelong and Flexible Learners Officer	1
Postgraduate Academic Officer	0
Science and Medicine Faculty President	2
Secretary to the SRC	2
Societies Officer	1
Student Health Officer	2
Widening Access and Participation Officer	2
PG Development Officer	1
PG Activities Officer	0
Total	**35**

Nine (9) of these posts were contested in the 2023 Elections, for a total of 41%. This is down 4% from the previous year's elections.

Student Trustee Races

Five (5) candidates stood for election as a Student Trustee, for which there were two posts. This is a slight decrease from the seven (7) candidates who stood in the previous academic year's election.

Academic Representation Races
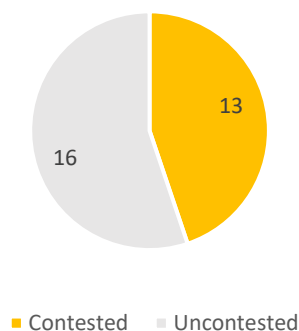
In total 49 candidates stood for School President or Language Convenor positions. This is a decrease of 31% from the previous year's elections (where 64 candidates stood for election).
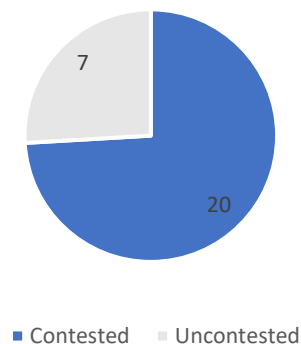

Academic Representation Candidates
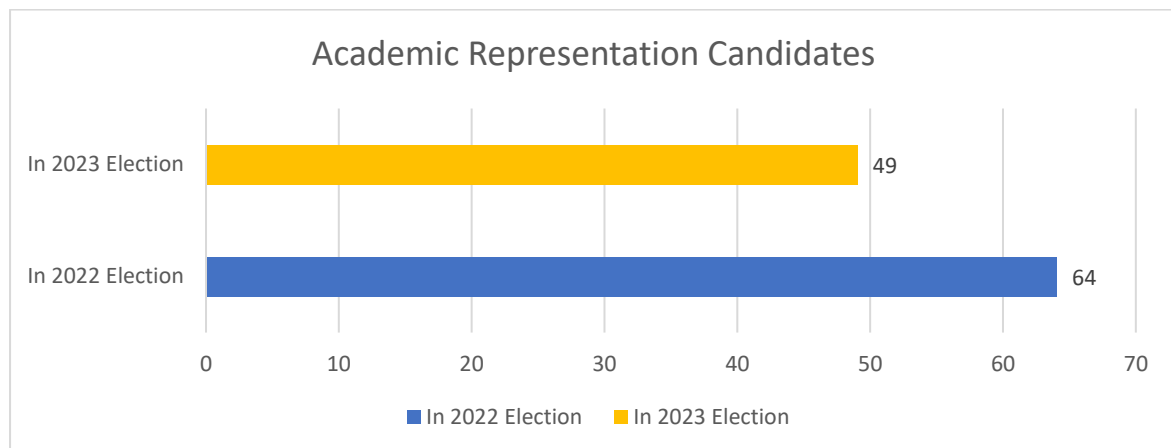
Just 45% (13) of the 29 Academic Representation posts were contested, down by 26% from 2022.

Contested Academic Rep Posts 2023

Contested Academic Rep Posts 2022

Positions and Candidates Analysis

Unfilled Positions

The PG Activities Officer and the Postgraduate Academic Officer were both unfilled positions this Election cycle. Additionally there were no candidates for the Modern Languages Arabic & Persian and the Modern Languages Russian position. Overall, there were few candidates (typically just one) for Modern Language positions.

Postgraduate positions have been repeatedly difficult to fill, even in the Postgraduate-focused elections in October. Postgraduate respondents frequently cite the high workload and university demands as a reason they are disinterested in a voluntary position. The likelihood of finding Postgraduate volunteers during a cost-of-living crisis was also low.

For the Language Convenor positions, the number of students eligible to run was very low (98 possible candidates for Arabic & Persian and just 80 for Russian). Both of these posts were successfully filled in co-options after the Election.

Number of Sabbatical Candidates

The total number of Sabbatical Candidates increased from 2022 to 2023. It is likely that this increase in interest developed as we have shifted away from the COVID-19 era. As student life returns to normal, it is likely that interests in major Students Association positions like the Sabbatical Offices have increased.

Additionally, the rise in interest in Sabbatical Races may be due to student dissatisfaction. Sabbatical candidates campaigned on a variety of student concerns including the cost of living crisis, the need for better student services, student safety (student spiking), and diversity within representation. It is likely that this dissatisfaction in student life at St Andrews has inspired greater interests in the student representation positions that have the power to affect change in the areas of concern. Additionally, most of the Sabbatical Candidates participated in in-person campaigning and were highly visible throughout the election, which drove interest in their position's race.

Lower Number of Academic Representation Candidates

The most substantial drop in candidates year-on-year was for School President and Language Convenor positions. At the time of the Election, a significant number of School Presidents were involved in planning/throwing large-scale events (such as STEM Ball) as well as participating in a challenging Undergraduate Academic Forum meeting and may have been stretched to their maximum. School President and Language Convenor workload is very high in Semester Two, which this year may have reasonably contributed to less visibility of the positions.

Anecdotally, there is some correlation between interest in a School President role and student satisfaction in the school. The positions that received the most attention and most competition were in schools where student conversations were surrounded with frustrations and grievances. This became apparent in conversations with the

candidates in answering their questions about running for a position, during the candidate mixer, and throughout the campaign process that followed.

Moving forward, it may be advisable to discuss with current school president's their perspectives on what is keeping students within their department from running for School President, taking into consideration department nuances. Further support to reduce and support School President workload would also allow them to be more visible during Elections and would ensure a more sustainable rep system generally.

Student Trustees

Interest in Student Trustee roles remained relatively high. Although there was a marginal dip (two fewer candidates) this year, a strong number of candidates resulted in a contested race. Interest can largely be explained by the fact that candidates for Trustee can also run for another non-Sabbatical post (4/5 candidates in this year's Trustee race also ran for another position).

Decrease in Contested Positions

A significant number of posts went uncontested in 2023 by comparison to 2022. All nine of the withdrawals were for contested posts and four of these withdrawals resulted in the position being uncontested. (Keeping those four candidates would have raised the percentage of contested posts to 53%).

A total of 11 incumbent Students' Association Officers (including three School Presidents and Language Convenors) ran for re-election or another position in the Election. Of these, seven (7) ran unopposed. There may be some correlation between well-known/incumbent officers (re-)running for a position and the position going uncontested.

Anecdotally, some students expressed that they liked the singular candidate who was standing and decided not to challenge them. Historically, there have been a few positions that go uncontested because the student community rallies around an individual candidate rather than creating a race for the post (e.g. LGBT+ Officer).

Some student feedback also indicated that potential candidates are worried that they might lose if their race is contested. There was a noted increase in candidate anxiety around losing the election that may have contributed to the drop in contested positions.

Last Minute Nominations

For the second year in a row, almost all of the nominations (easily 70% or more of the total candidates) declared on the portal in the last 48 hours before the deadline. This suggests that many of the candidates were waiting to nominate themselves, either strategically or because they weren't aware of the deadline.

Councillors and Subcommittee Participation

Outgoing Officers and Subcommittee leads were more visibly involved in Elections in 2023 than in the previous year. Several outgoing officers and leaders advertised their position to the student body, participated in videos and promotional campaigns, and volunteered their time on voting days. An organised "Pledge to Vote" campaign helped to engage some officers and subcommittees. On the whole, participation varied widely by individual capacity. Continued efforts to engage outgoing officers in the general promotion of elections will be necessary to increasing engagement.

Nudge Tool

As in previous years, the Elections Team ran a "Nudge" campaign to send anonymous encouragement to prospective candidates. The total number of Nudges submitted decreased significantly from 2022, sliding from 481 Nudges down to 307 in the 2023 Election (-36%).

This year, an "Express Interest" option was added to the Nudge Tool. This allowed students to self-declare their interest in a position prior to nominations opening. The Elections Team contacted the students who expressed interest and provided more information about the position, including reminders when no one had yet declared.

Intriguingly, in 2022, the majority of Nudges submitted were to encourage "Sabbatical Officer" candidates, and those races saw a substantial drop in candidates. Similarly, in 2023, the majority of Nudges submitted were for an Academic Representation role, which this year had the most substantial drop in candidate numbers. It is possible that the Nudge Tool may be disincentivising people from talking directly to potential candidates who otherwise may stand.

One possible explanation for the overall drop in Nudges may be the priority on securing Pledge to Vote signups that took prominence during the pre-nominations period.

Timing of Elections

Overall, the decrease in competition over Students Association positions may in-part be attributed to the time of year in which the Elections took place. Positioned around the February Break, Elections took place in a peak time for deadlines and student travel plans. It is likely that across the board candidacy numbers were low due to the fact students were busy with academic and social engagements.

Future Actions

There are a number of other efforts that the Staff Elections Team (and student officers and others) could implement in future elections in an effort to increase the overall number of candidates, detailed below:

- Create targeted marketing campaigns to recruit candidates for posts that historically have proven challenging to fill (e.g. Postgraduate Positions, Lifelong & Flexible Learner's Officer, etc.).
- Consider ways to continue to make Sabbatical and voluntary roles more attractive to candidates by clarifying support structures, compensation, resources/training, and the difference students can make in these roles.
- Conclude discussions regarding remuneration for Postgraduate positions, which has been recommended since at least 2020.
- Holding conversations with students in departments with low Elections engagement to workshop ideas on how to spark greater engagement.
- Review the elections timeline, including the length of time allotted to each stage of the election; engage with students to understand the best time in the semester for nominations – bearing in mind general coursework deadlines/examinations, and when graduating students determine their plans for the next year. Talk about Elections during Semester One.
- Make efforts to continually improve the visibility of student officers and their initiatives across all levels of the Association. (Partner with Design & Marketing to share Officers' success stories and what they've advocated on and achieved throughout the year).
- Continue to remind non-Sabbatical Candidates that they are eligible to run for a Student Trustee position.
- Build workshops and resources to encourage students to put themselves forward for positions, specifically focusing on skills like resilience, dealing with failure, and candidate support resources.

Breakdown by School

Statistics

School	# Candidates	Votes Cast	Eligible Voters	Voter Turnout	Votes Per Candidate
Art History	2	124	723	17%	62.00
Biology	1	160	1,167	14%	160.00
Chemistry	1	102	809	13%	102.00
Classics	1	98	732	13%	98.00
Computer Science	1	135	939	14%	135.00
Divinity	2	54	277	19%	27.00
Earth and Environmental Sciences	2	90	534	17%	45.00
Economics and Finance	2	183	1309	14%	91.50
English	1	138	822	17%	138.00
Film Studies	1	66	417	16%	66.00
Geography and Sustainable Development	3	190	1184	16%	63.33
History	1	204	1192	17%	204.00
International Relations	4	329	1365	24%	82.25
Management	3	142	1032	14%	47.33
Math and Stats	3	227	1601	14%	75.67
Medicine	5	224	730	30.7%	44.80
Modern Languages	1	210	1284	16%	210.00
Modern Languages Arabic & Persian	0	0	192	0%	0.00
Modern Languages Chinese	1	17	75	23%	17.00
Modern Languages Comparative Literature	1	54	386	14%	54.00
Modern Languages French	1	61	263	23%	61.00
Modern Languages German	1	37	185	20%	37.00
Modern Languages Italian	1	14	156	9%	14.00
Modern Languages Russian	0	0	125	0%	0.00
Modern Languages Spanish	2	56	286	20%	28.00
Philosophy	1	135	996	14%	0.00
Physics and Astronomy	2	174	558	31.2%	87.00
Psychology and Neuroscience	2	273	1066	26%	136.50
Social Anthropology	3	99	743	13%	33.00
Total	**49**	**3596**	**21,148**		
Average	**1.69**	**124.00**		**17%**	**73.08**

Analysis

Top Votes by School

The Schools with the highest proportional voter turnout are: Physics & Astronomy (31.2%); Medicine (30.7%); Psychology & Neuroscience (26%); International Relations (24%); and Modern Languages, both French and Chinese (23%).

Only two Schools (Psychology & Neuroscience and International Relations) were in this top bracket both this year and last year.

All Schools and Departments (except for Italian) achieved 10% or greater turnout.

Votes per Candidate

Consistent with 2022's statistics, the top Schools for the number of votes per candidate were those with only one candidate: Modern Languages (210); History (204); Biology (160); English (138); and Computer Science (135).

Impressively, the School of Psychology & Neuroscience averaged 136.5 votes per candidate in a contested race (5th overall).

Several Schools (such as Divinity, Social Anthropology, and Medicine) received comparatively few votes per candidate despite having contested races.

As previously written, this trend indicates that more factors besides just the number of candidates contribute to voter turnout.

Overall Results by Faculty

This year, the Arts & Divinity Faculty took 51% of the vote (1838 votes) compared to the 49% (1758 votes) in Science & Medicine.
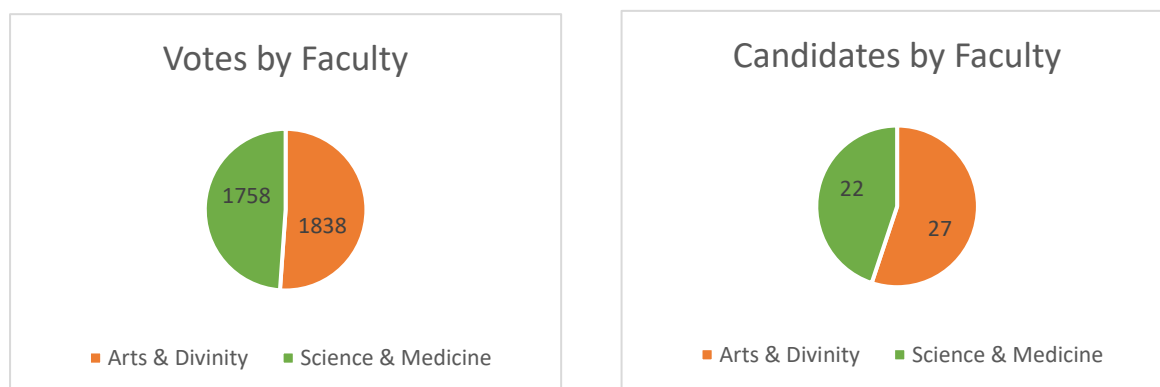
The Arts & Divinity Faculty also captured 55% of the candidates (27 candidates) compared to Science & Medicine's 45% (22 candidates).

In the 2022 Election, Science students accounted for 52% of the vote; this reversal on votes indicates either a drop of engagement in Science & Medicine or a rise in activity and campaigning from Arts & Divinity.

Interestingly, the percentage of the candidates from Science & Medicine schools rose from 39% in 2022 to 45% this year. Both Faculties, however, experienced a decrease in candidates (12 fewer candidates in Arts, 3 fewer in Sciences). The difference in candidate shares may be attributed to the fact that there are more positions available in Arts than in Sciences.

Future Actions

There are a number of other efforts that the Staff Elections Team (and student officers and others) could implement in future elections in an effort to increase participation from Schools, detailed below:

- Reassess the impact of the Prize Awarded to the School President with the highest percentage of voter turnout.
  - (In the winning School, Physics and Astronomy, the number of votes cast were nearly identical year on year. The runner-up School, Medicine, did experience a significant uptick in voter turnout, going from 108 voters to 224 this year).
- Ensure consistent support, resourcing, and reminders reach School Presidents and Language Convenors leading up to Elections.
- Protect School Presidents and Language Convenors from having to take on large projects in and around Elections time as much as possible.

Publicity & Events

Efforts to advertise and increase awareness in the Election continued to ramp up from 2022. Utilising the previous year's approach to weekly catch ups and outlines of when content will be published allowed for an efficient workstream between the Elections staff and the Design & Marketing Team who were instrumental in the design and aesthetic reach of the Election.

A strong mix of in-person events and online promotional efforts made the Election visible from the start of Second Semester and created a visible presence around Election activity. With a steady push of social media content on numerous University-wide platforms in Second Semester, students were informed about Election news. Students were also kept up to date about Elections through in person information and question sessions before lectures, society, and sport club meetings.

Strategies Actioned

Elections Launch Party
In Second Semester, the Elections staff organized the Elections Launch Party in an effort to provide a space for position holders and possible candidates to mingle and discuss the various roles available to run for. The event was held prior to the close of nominations in March to increase nomination numbers by allowing possible candidates to gain more information about the Election process and the positions. The event layout was designed to foster a collaborative and social environment with different tables for SRC candidates, Sabbatical Officer candidates, Academic-related candidates, and more. There was also a dedicated questions table run by the Elections staff where the organisers answered questions from candidates and provided advice about their campaigns and the Elections process. All in all, the event was a success as several attendees decided to submit nominations and candidates felt more confident about the election process. Approximately 50 attendees were present at the event.

Town Halls (Formerly Hustings)
This year, the traditional "Hustings" format was significantly remodelled. In the past, all Student Representative Council (SRC) Officers attended one 4+ hour event called the "SRC Hustings." This year, the SRC Officer candidates were asked to attend one of the following events based on relevancy to their position:

- Academic Town Hall
- Wellbeing & Equality Town Hall
- Advocacy Town Hall

This restructure proved to be highly successful, with turnout for the first two events reaching roughly 50 audience members. (The Advocacy Town Hall was the least attended, with closer to 25 audience members). Questions could then be focused on thematic area and gave students opportunities to ask more questions because each position's candidates could be on stage for a longer period of time.

The events were well moderated and were livestreamed as well to ensure that participation was possible online. The questions that were chosen comprised of student submitted questions and prewritten questions written by the Elections organisers. A mix of questions were chosen to ensure that candidates were asked about a wide array of issues. (Questions were once again solicited via a QR code that was displayed in the room and then were filtered/moderated by the Elections Staff to ensure fairness and appropriateness).

The Academic Town Hall received 105 online views; the Wellbeing & Equality Town Hall received 123 online views; and the Advocacy Town Hall received 105 online views.

Presidential Debate
In addition, the former "Sabbatical Debate" was restructured in 2023. The DoEd Candidate talked at the Academic Town Hall, the DoWell Candidates spoke at the Wellbeing & Equality Town Hall, and the DoSDA and DoES candidates spoke at the Advocacy Town Halls. The Association President and Athletic Union President candidates participated in a separate event, moderated by the outgoing AUP and a former Association President and alumni.

This event reached roughly 100 in person attendees and ran for two hours. Online viewership reached a peak of 29 concurrent viewers and the recording received 846 total views.

Class Raps, Society Raps
In efforts to boost in-person engagement, Election organisers visited lectures, society meetings, and sport clubs to speak with students about nominations, the pledge to vote campaign, and the upcoming Elections. The Team visited approximately 25 classrooms, and five societies/sports clubs. These information and question sessions only lasted a few minutes but were crucial in driving engagement especially for nominations and pledge to vote campaign. Organisers passed around QR Codes and encouraged students to nominate themselves, to Nudge a friend, and to pledge to vote.

Social Media
Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook were utilized to engage with students. The Design & Marketing team were fabulous at generating social media graphics and content which included important information for the various election-related initiatives including the pledge to vote campaign, nomination dates, election days, and more. Social media was also used to better connect with and hear from students. The election organisers communicated with student and societies and answered questions via direct messages (DMs) on Instagram and Facebook. Organisers also used the question feature on Instagram stories to hear directly from students and gain unique insight. The use of videos and short clips were also well-received this year.

Social Media – Takeovers

One of the most important aspects of the social media strategy was Instagram takeovers. Election organisers were given permission to access the Student Union and University Instagram accounts and post stories on selected days. Both accounts have over 60,000 followers combined, this meant that election-related content was significantly amplified. These takeovers were in the form of 'day of the lives' and followed our Election Organisers on the day of the Election Launch Party, the close of nominations, a few of the townhalls, and voting days. The Elections team also explored putting up video posts and content from Sabbatical Candidates this year, which helped students to get to know who was running. The takeovers allowed the Election staff to promote events and key election information to a larger audience.

Tabling

This year, the Elections staff ramped up tabling efforts in order to drive in-person campaigning. In past years, due to COVID restrictions, campaigning lacked visibility, but this year the Elections staff set up tables outside key hubs of student life to engage directly with students. The tables were set up outside Main Library, the Student Union, the Sports Centre, and the Physics building on important days such as the close of nominations and voting days. The Election Organisers also set up a table during a Sports Sinners club night to encourage students to pledge to vote. At the tables, incentives such as candy and baked goods piqued the interests of students and resulted in increased engagement. The tabling initiative facilitated important conversations between students and elections all while promoting relevant information about the Elections.

Publicity Materials

Due to the finite budget, publicity materials were limited. The Elections team felt that it was most important to allocate the materials budget to the voting incentives, which were cupcakes. A small portion of the budget was also spent on tabling incentives such as baked goods and candy. And lastly, the remainder of the budget was devoted to flyers, banners, and promotional Corex boards.

Email Templates

Pre-drafted student communications were of use to elected leaders, particularly School Presidents and Language Convenors. However, there was not a centralised tracking system to see who had sent out which communication on which timeline. In the future, it may be helpful to have the Councils Intern and the Academic Representation Intern follow up with SRC Members and School Presidents respectively to ensure that each communication has been sent out.

Press

The Saint published a full Elections edition this year (in exchange for splitting printing costs) and had volunteers distributing the newspaper on the first day of voting. This partnership proved effective to driving the physical presence around the election and also for directing students to additional information about the candidates at the voting booths.

The Saint also provided coverage of the Town Hall and Debate events and were invited to interview candidates at the Launch Party. Coverage was largely balanced and well-received and this partnership should be continued in future years.

Strategy Limitations

Post Share Requests

Due to a lack of access, the Elections Organisers were not able to send messages from the Union Instagram requesting that other accounts share our posts and due to a lack of time, few share requests went out from the SA Elect Facebook. The organisers also felt that it was difficult to reach out to key student groups given the short communication timeframe. Additionally, having a streamlined approach for cross-platform messaging may have expanded the reach and visibility of our posts.

Social Media Platforms

Although Instagram and Facebook were useful platforms for promoting Elections content, there are other social media sites that could have been utilized. For example, TikTok and Twitter were not included in the general social media strategy. Given the user engagement of these platforms, specifically regarding students, promoting content on both platforms would allow for a broader reach of Elections information.

Halls

There was less engagement within Halls of Residence compared to previous years. This was largely due to time limitations of the Elections staff. In the future, securing partnerships with halls staff and student leaders would be an effective way to continue driving students to vote and engage in elections generally.

Resources

At several points, the Election budget was stretched between events, promotional materials, and voting incentives. Additional financial investment in the Election Budget could allow for the following publicity and event opportunities:

- Paid social media advertisements
- Hosting Election information sessions and related events
- Elections organiser office hours
- Additional voting incentives

Future Actions

There are a number of possible actions the Elections Team, as well as student representatives, could include in future elections planning. Overall, these ideas focus on generating greater interest from students, which should then positively impact the number of nominations as well as overall voter turnout:

- Assign the Councils and Academic Representation Interns the task of following up about post-shares and email templates with SRC and Educom respectively.
- Prioritise time and support for messaging other accounts to share our posts. Ideally, share requests would be sent from the official Union accounts.
- Continue the "Town Hall" format for Q&A time with the candidates. Consider further restructuring and rebranding the "Advocacy Town Hall" to make its purpose and interest group clearer.
    - Consider removing uncontested races (i.e. races with just one candidate) from the event agenda. Encourage students to participate/learn from their campaigns in other ways (such as videos).
- Continue to partner with The Saint Newspaper to hand out an Elections-featured edition on voting day(s). Ensure a QR code linking to the voting platform is included in the Saint's physical media to gauge how many student voters came from that platform.
- Further collaborate with an array of society and sports groups to hold events and gain insight in order to promote and foster diversity and inclusion in the Student Elections.
- Use paper sign-up sheets for the Pledge to Vote campaign and to pass around in Class and Society Raps.
- Explore and trial paid media advertising (such as boosted posts on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok).
- Create a Union Elections Instagram to post more regular/daily content.
- Launch an "About the Roles" campaign prior to the start of Semester 2 on Facebook and Instagram.

Feedback from Participants and Candidates

Summary of Feedback Received

During the 2023 Election Cycle, a (current/outgoing) Sabbatical Officer raised the concern that separating the out the "Presidential Debate" created the harmful perception that some Sabbatical positions are more important than others. While no changes were able to be made to the schedule, this is a point to consider for splitting up the event schedule for 2024 and beyond.

A (current/outgoing) Sabbatical Officer also raised the point that they believed the rolling release of manifestos on the Union website gave an unfair advantage to candidates who submitted a nomination early in the Election process. Similar complaints about the posting of manifestos were raised by candidates who turned in their manifestos on the final day of submissions. This choice to upload manifestos on a rolling basis was made in the 2022 Election cycle and was made public to all candidates via email. The main reason for this change was staffing constraints; with a very small administration and web team, uploading all 100+ campaign documents at once would cause a heavy bottleneck during the close of nominations. The Deputy Returning Officers ensured that all manifestos were made public via the Election Portal (where votes were actually cast) and evaluated that any advantage gained by earlier website coverage was very slight- certainly not enough to determine the outcome of any election. Candidates also complained about the length of time it took to update photos and materials submitted to the Election Portal. In the future, the process for receiving publicly-posted campaign materials should be re-evaluated for clarity and taking into consideration candidate perspectives as well as staffing demands. Candidates also need to be better informed that they are responsible for submitting content earlier (and correctly the first time). Candidates are also responsible for sharing their own messaging with student voters.

Following the Election, one candidate requested that additional guidance and training for non-candidate students participating in campaign teams be instated. The idea to create an electronic/self-paced training was proposed and will be considered. (The candidate was also advised that candidates are held accountable for the actions of their campaign teams and therefore are obliged to inform their friends/teams of the rules.)

During and following the Election, several complaints regarding endorsement rules were received. Although the rule has remained relatively consistent (with only a small tweak to Society/Sport Club Officers being able to use their titles in an endorsement), the complaints suggested that this "new rule" was confusing and unfair. The complainants requested that no sitting Students' Association Officer be allowed to endorse a particular candidate, even without referencing their title. The Elections Team recommends no changes be made to this rule, despite the complaints received, as current Students' Association Officers have the right to participate in the election as much as any other student. Advice and guidance will

continue to be issued to Students' Association Officers about the formal rules as well as the strong recommendation to remain publicly impartial.

Following the Election, several students cited a need for Candidate Wellbeing Check Ins throughout the Election Cycle. The Elections Team supports this recommendation and has met with Student Services to explore potential collaboration. A Candidate Wellbeing Guide was also published and distributed. Due to the volume of candidates and the availability of staff (especially within Student Services), it may prove challenging to offer 1:1 appointments but all options for support will continue to be explored.

In a post-election survey, several responses indicated that they believed the Elections Staff to be "biased" particularly with regard to Sabbatical Candidates. For example: "This year it was apparent that people had favourite candidates with Sabbs and showed favouritism". No evidence was cited to support claims of bias. Responsibility for running the Election was transferred to staff in the 2022 academic year and one of the primary reasons for this change was the impartiality of staff (compared to sitting student officers who previously organised elections). The Elections Staff made great efforts to express neutrality both publicly and privately, especially given that four out of six sitting Sabbatical Officers were also standing as candidates in the Election. Candidates were also informed that if they felt that the actions of the Elections Staff were questionable, they could file a complaint with the Returning Officer (an external volunteer from another Students' Association) who would review the complaint. Only one complaint was made (related to unfair procedure) and the Returning Officer determined there was no bias or unfair application of procedure against the candidate. It is difficult to suggest how the Election could be made any more neutral; it may be advisable to post user-friendly diagrams of how Elections complaints are processed (in addition to the guidance in the bylaws and rules) so that the process is made even clearer to candidates.

Finally, candidates who responded to the survey presented largely-unified feedback regarding the Election Timeline. All respondents agreed that the nomination period (14 days) was the right length of time. All but one candidate suggested that the campaigning period (7 days) was too short.

Future Actions

Based on participant feedback the following actions may be explored for 2024:

- Consider renaming the Town Halls to be "Wellbeing & Equality Town Hall & DoWell Debate" and similar for each event.
  - Alternatively, returning to a unified Sabbatical Officer Debate may ensure equity between the Sabbatical Positions (for time reasons, this event could be split into two nights with three Sabb positions debating in each).
- Ensure that the final deadline to submit or edit manifestos is within one to two business days following the close of nominations. (While this will

restrict the timeline for candidates to make edits and changes, it will also incentivise earlier submission).

- Set designated time windows for when campaign documents will be made public. (For example, on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 5pm, with submissions cut off at 12pm the same day).
  - o Alternatively, set a campaign materials deadline (a few days after nominations close but before voting) after which all documents will be published at once.
- Record a simple training video for non-candidates who are part of a campaign team to watch so that they are informed of the core rules. Remind candidates that complaints can be made against campaign team members in the Mandatory Candidate Meeting.
- Explore options for Candidate Wellbeing Check-Ins; continue to publish and inform candidates of the Wellbeing Guide. Explore the possibility of adding workshops to build candidate skills and confidence participating in the election
- Create and publish graphics about the Elections Complaints procedure to make the process clearer to candidates.
- Trial a lengthening of the campaigning period from one week to two weeks.

Summary of Action Items

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