

Candidate Wellbeing Guide 2023

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Introduction

We're so excited you're thinking about standing for election!

The following guide contains some suggestions and information around support. **None of this constitutes professional, psychological, or therapeutic advice.** The advice here comes from our personal experiences and online research (all resources are shared). As such, everything is general and may not help everyone.

Some parts of this guide may not resonate with people who have existing mental or physical health conditions, disabilities, and/or neurodivergence.

Only take on the suggestions you feel will be useful for you. You are the best judge of what you need.

Toward the end of this guide we have provided detail around mitigations/accommodations, what to expect at Town Halls and Results Night, and an access guide for the physical spaces we will be using.

Please remember that your health and wellbeing always take priority, then your studies and work commitments and personal life, then Elections, in that order!

Whatever happens in the Elections, please know you are good enough.

Fear of failure

Failure is a natural and normal part of life. Failures, not getting answers right, and not getting jobs we thought we wanted can be valuable experiences and teach us a lot about ourselves. This doesn't mean that failures or mistakes aren't painful – they can be.

You may find the following steps helpful:

- Sometimes when we're worrying about failure, our thoughts can spiral and quickly become overwhelming. It can be helpful (strange as it sounds), to think of the worst case scenario. In this case, the worst case scenario is that you lose the election and you might be upset. That's it. Nothing else will happen. That is the absolute worst case scenario.
- Then, spend time thinking (or drawing or writing down, whatever works for you) how you can deal with the worst case scenario. What will you do if you don't get this role? Immediately afterwards you might wallow for a bit while you get over the initial disappointment. Maybe you could plan what you'll do in the first few days after the election; plan a night in or a night out, chat to friends, do something fun, pick up a hobby you haven't done for a while.
- Work out what you will do instead of that role. There will always be other opportunities. You might join one of the subcommittees instead, run again next year, or look at roles outside of Union democracy that you think you'll enjoy. Not getting elected right now does not mean you're any less capable of succeeding in another role.
- Acknowledge how you feel honestly. If you feel like crying, have a cry. If you feel frustrated, you can say to yourself or others "I feel really frustrated I didn't get elected." If you feel disappointed, upset, angry, or any other emotion, name it.
- Talk to people you trust about how you feel. Failure is such a normal part of life, so people you share this experience with will be able to empathise and offer support. If you aren't ready to talk about it with other people, you can always write it down for your eyes only.
- Talk to yourself like you'd talk to someone you love like a friend, family member or partner. We're our own worst critics, and would never say to a friend "you're such a failure, no wonder you lost." Maybe try instead something like "I know you're upset that you lost the election, but it doesn't mean you won't succeed in future." This is also sometimes called [self-compassion](#).

Please remember that failing now does not undo successes you've had to date (like getting into University, achievements in extra-curricular activities, having good friends). It can be helpful to think of these things as a redirection toward an opportunity that suits you better. More than anything, be proud you tried at all.

You may find some of the following resources helpful:

- Here's a [New York Times article](#) on overcoming failure. It is focused on women, but it provides good general advice.
- Here's a [TED talk about rejection](#) and what you can learn from it.
- Here's a [playlist of TED talks](#) called 'The Benefits of Failure.'

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is something many people struggle with. Difficulties with self-esteem can be really complex and come from multiple sources. Any advice here is very general and may not be helpful for everyone.

Self-esteem is basically how we see ourselves. It can be positive “I like myself, I think I’m funny/intelligent/gentle/kind,” neutral “I respect myself” or negative “I don’t like myself, I don’t think I’m very good at this thing.”

Having negative self-esteem can have a lot of consequences on your life. If you have low self-esteem, it might prevent you from realising your unique talents and going for opportunities that excite you. It can also affect your relationships and your mental wellbeing more generally.

If you’d like to explore ways to support or improve your self-esteem, here are a few suggestions:

- Gently notice the way you talk to yourself. If something negative has happened, you might say to yourself “I am a failure.” A useful way to reframe your thoughts might be to say instead “this time, I failed X.” This way you avoid labelling yourself in an unkind way.
- Spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself.
- Do a hobby you enjoy that makes you feel positive emotions.
- Journal or draw your feelings or share them with people you care about.
- Recognise your successes to date. These could be small (going for a walk), or bigger things (trying something new)
- Keep (realistic) promises to yourself – this can help you trust yourself. If you say to yourself “I’m going to drink some water first thing tomorrow,” and then you do what you said you would, you’re showing yourself that you can trust yourself.
- Be kind to yourself on difficult days.

Some resources that may be helpful:

- [‘Why self-worth matters and how to improve yours’](#) from BetterHelp
- [‘Boost your self-esteem: activities and tips to help’](#) from BetterHelp
- [‘Building healthy self-esteem’](#) from BetterHelp
- [Self-esteem resources](#) from Mind
- A [CBT based self-help guide](#) from NHS Inform

Regret

We regret all sorts of things in life, things we did and did not do. You might regret saying something harsh to a friend, or not spending enough time with the people you love. We even regret small things, like staying up late on TikTok instead of going to bed early.

When it comes to elections, you may be thinking you shouldn’t run because you’re afraid you won’t get elected. Perhaps you’re scared about running because you get anxious speaking to people or being in the spotlight. These are valid worries, and it’s totally ok to feel like this.

Regret often gets a bad reputation, but it can be a really helpful experience for future life. Whether you decide to run for election or not, we hope this section will reassure you that

regret is natural, and that you can move through the discomfort and use the experiences in a more positive way.

As painful as they are, regrets can be helpful. We now have more information to work with, and this can help us to make decisions we are happier with in future.

Ultimately you have to do what you feel is right for you – you are the best judge of that. We make the best decisions we can based on the information we have available to us at the time, regardless of what information we find out later. Don't punish yourself for doing what you thought was right at the time.

If you have regrets about anything, not just around Elections, there's plenty of suggestions of how you can support yourself:

- Be honest about how you feel. Name the feeling you're experiencing.
- Talk about it with people you trust or with services like Student Services, Nightline, SHOUT, Samaritans, or other services.
- Practise self-compassion, and talk to yourself like you would talk to a friend.
- Remind yourself that you've grown a lot from past experiences, and you'll learn more from this experience too.
- Remember that you're not alone. The [World Regret Survey](#) has been running for the last 18 months, with over 19,000 people from 105 countries taking part.

Here are some resources you may find helpful:

- An article from [BetterHelp](#) on moving forward from regrets.
- A [BBC article](#) on how to live with your regrets.
- A [Psychology Today](#) piece containing tips on living with regrets.
- A [playlist of TED Talks](#) about coping with regrets.

Anxiety

Feeling anxious at difficult or scary moments can be a natural reaction to doing things that are out of your comfort zone. **For the purposes of this section, we are not referring to more serious and long-term anxiety for which you may be seeking medical or psychological support.** We are focusing instead on the anxiousness candidates may experience about the Elections period.

Anxiousness around or fear of public speaking

Sometimes this can be called 'stage fright' which is essentially fear/stress/anxiety around speaking or performing in front of other people. Some people may experience this more intensely due to social anxiety or other related conditions.

Here are some ideas that may help you to manage your fear around public speaking:

- Plan what you are going to say ahead of time if you can. At the Town Halls you will receive some questions ahead of time which you can prepare for. For other questions which you will not know beforehand, you might bring some bullet points of things to remember that might be helpful. You might practise in front of the mirror if you would find that helpful.
- Wear clothes that make you feel comfortable and confident. This doesn't mean you have to wear a full 3 piece suit, instead focus on wearing clothes you like.

- Remind yourself that you can do this, because you can! Before you go on stage, you might repeat positive affirmations to yourself such as “I am brave, I can do this,” “everything is ok,” or “I’m proud of myself for taking on this challenge.” These can help you to calm down and focus on the positives.
- Take some deep breaths. One pattern that may help you is ‘square breathing.’ You breathe in for 4, hold for 4, breathe out for 4, and hold for 4, and then start again. You can increase or decrease the count as you need, the important thing is to keep the counts the same at each point. The aim here is to get your breathing and heart rate at a slower, calmer pace, which will help you to come out of any fight or flight response.
- Be gentle with yourself around your fears. When fears or anxiety come up, we can often tell ourselves to “get over it” which isn’t helpful or fair. Often, these feelings are a way of our body/brain trying to protect us from what it sees as threats. Perhaps you might like to say to yourself “thank you for looking out for me, but I am safe.”
- Talk to someone you trust or write down your feelings.

Some resources you may find helpful:

- [10 tips to get over a fear of public speaking](#) from BetterHelp
- [7 tips to help you overcome stage fright](#) from BetterHelp
- A series of [TED talks](#) around public speaking
- A guided visual video on [square breathing](#)

Fear around campaigning/being visible to people

Most of us experience a fear of being visible or the centre of attention at some point in our lives. You may experience this around campaigning when you put yourself and your ideas out there. It’s natural to find this daunting if not downright scary! Remind yourself you can do this when these feelings come up. If you can, get your friends together into a campaign team to share that load so the responsibility isn’t always on you.

You may sometimes experience this because you’re afraid of what other people will think or say about you. Gentle reminder: people are much more focused on themselves and really don’t care about what you do or how you behave.

While you can’t control what people think about you, you can control how you behave and how you think and respond. Remind yourself that while you can’t control how others see you, you can control how you talk to and perceive yourself. Perhaps try some affirmations like “it is safe for me to be seen,” “I can do this,” “I am capable,” or any other affirmation that will help you. Ultimately, we want you to share your unique talents, views, and skills with us!

You may find some of these resources helpful:

- A [blog post](#) on the fear of being seen
- A [TED talk](#) on the power of being seen
- A [TED talk](#) on feeling anxious in social situations and what to do about it

Stress

Stress can be a natural response to life. Having too little stress in life can mean we don’t do anything at all (is there’s no stress, there’s no drive to take action). Having just the right

amount of stress can help us to do our best work because we feel motivated. Too much stress can be really unpleasant – we feel overwhelmed, panicked, and at the worst point we can feel burnt out.

There are lots of things you can do when you feel stressed. You may already have built up techniques you can use in these moments, but in case you need inspiration, here's some suggestions:

- Do something just for you that reminds you of who you really are. This could be doing something crafty, reading, doing exercise, spending time outside, picking up an old hobby – anything that feels fun to you. Taking this break will help you to reconnect to what makes you happy, and will help you feel more focused when you come back to your tasks.
- Try and get enough sleep if you can. If you struggle with sleep, resting somewhere comfortable and doing relaxing things may be just as beneficial.
- Focus on one thing at a time. Maybe write a to-do list and note which things you have to do today, and which things can wait till tomorrow or the days afterwards. Then go back and do just one thing from that list that has to be done today.
- Ask for help. This might be just speaking to people to get your worries off your chest, or could be delegating tasks to other people.
- Think about all the times that you faced stress or difficulties and how you overcame the situation. Hopefully this will show you that you can do difficult things!
- Write down, draw out, or otherwise describe and acknowledge your feelings.

Some resources:

- The [stress curve](#) from the MindWell NHS website
- [7 tips on how to handle stressful situations](#) from BetterHelp
- [Feeling overwhelmed?](#) from BetterHelp
- [Stress resources](#) from Mental Health Foundation
- ['How dance helps me deal with stress'](#) TED talk
- ['The routines, rituals and boundaries we need in stressful times'](#) TED talk
- ['How to make stress your friend'](#) TED talk
- [TED talks](#) for when you feel burnt out

Time management

When you've got lots of different priorities it can be difficult to manage your time. There are various strategies you can use to help you manage your time more effectively so that it works for you not against you. Time management isn't about devoting more time to work, it's about using the time you have so you can get things done. One method is the Eisenhower Box. Draw a square and then 4 squares within the box like below:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Important and urgent</p> <p>These are the highest priority tasks to do now and that are really important.</p> | <p>Important but not urgent</p> <p>These tasks are important but you don't need to do them right now.</p> |
| <p>Urgent but not important</p> <p>These are things that are time-sensitive but not tasks that you have to prioritise.</p> | <p>Not urgent and not important</p> <p>These are things that are not time-sensitive and aren't important to achieving goals</p> |

You can include things related to your studies, Elections, and your personal life in this matrix. Focus on the top left box first and then the top right. You might need to change what goes where, and that's ok. You might not find this style of time management helpful – find what works for you!

Another way to do it might be writing down 2-3 goals you need to achieve today (big or small). Set a timer for 10 minutes and see how far you get with just one of those goals. You might find after 10 minutes that the task is done, or you might find that you want to continue working on the task for a bit. You might also find that the goal wasn't that important, in which case try a different goal and come back to it later if you have time.

Make sure you take breaks where you can. Some people might work for 30 mins and break for 5 minutes. Whatever schedule you set yourself, make sure that when you take breaks it's a proper break away from your tasks. You might get a glass of water, get a bit of fresh air, put on your favourite song, anything that will help you get a short break.

Here are some resources that may help:

- [The time management matrix](#) from BetterHelp
- [Define time management to regain control of your schedule](#) from BetterHelp
- [Easy time-management tips](#) from NHS Inform
- An article with [6 of the best TED talks about time management](#)

Procrastination

Procrastination is putting things off till later when we know we need to do the task as soon as we can. We often procrastinate boring things or things we think are stressful or difficult. We've all procrastinated – it's a normal human response.

Sometimes procrastination can be about stress or anxiety or other negative emotions. Perhaps you're scared of getting something wrong, or you feel panicked about an assignment or piece of work because it feels really big and impossible to finish. Instead of starting to tackle the task you don't even start it at all to protect yourself from whatever negative emotions you expect to feel during the task.

Here are some ideas about how you might tackle procrastination:

- As a first step to dealing with whatever you're procrastinating, acknowledge how you feel. Anxious? Stressed? Scared? Bored? Tired? Whatever it is, acknowledge and accept how you feel. Whatever you feel, it's ok to feel that way. You might journal, draw, or just think about how you feel.
- Break tasks down into smaller, more manageable sections. For example, if you're starting on your manifesto, step 1 could be writing a bullet point list of 3 ideas you have that you might like to take forward. Write down the first few that come to mind, you don't have to stick with them, but just get them down on paper. The important thing is to start somewhere. Maybe write down all the steps you need to take to complete a task and tick each one off as you complete them. This will make the task a bit less daunting and give you the added bonus of ticking things off a to-do list!
- You might try the Pomodoro Technique. This is where you choose a task, set a timer for 25 minutes and work on that task till the timer rings, take a 5 minute break, and then start the process again. After around 4 sets, take a longer break of around 30 minutes. You can customise this however you like and find a time interval that works for you. The important thing is to work to get things done, and make sure you take breaks.
- Reward yourself when you get things done. Whatever reward you choose, enjoy it fully and remind yourself of all the good work you've done today up to that point. Time spent doing things that we enjoy and that we find supportive is not a reward, it's a necessity, though time to ourselves can feel more satisfying when we've completed a few other tasks throughout the day!

Here are some resources that may help:

- ['Why do people procrastinate \(and how can I stop?\)'](#) from BetterHelp
- ['A procrastination definition and tips to overcome it'](#) from BetterHelp
- [The Pomodoro Technique](#)
- ['Why you procrastinate even when it feels bad'](#) TED-Ed
- ['Inside the mind of a master procrastinator'](#) TED talk

Harassment/abuse

During Elections, you may experience harassment or abuse from other students including online, which is completely unacceptable. We do not tolerate harassment or abuse.

If this happens, come and talk to us about how you're feeling.

You can also contact Student Services about what's happened. Instead of using the online booking form, email (TheASC@st-andrews.ac.uk) or call the ASC on 01334 46 2020 and explain that you are a candidate running for election. Student Services will still triage based on risk, but the team know to expect that candidates will need support and will do their very best to get you the right support as soon as they can.

If appropriate, you could use [Report + Support](#). You can report anonymously or with contact details. Depending on your situation, you might select 'bullying' 'harassment' or 'hate crime.' If you aren't sure, you can select 'Other' and give a bit more information.

If you experience online or in person harassment or abuse, please email saelect@st-andrews.ac.uk. Negative campaigning is against the [Election Rules](#) and perpetrators found to be in violation of the rules will be sanctioned.

Self-compassion

Self-compassion is a term created by Dr Kristin Neff, and is simply turning compassion around to yourself. You might think about this as treating yourself like you would a friend, family member, or someone else you care about. Practising self-compassion can be difficult, especially when struggling with other things at the same time.

Part of self-compassion is positive self-talk. Think about a time when something hasn't gone right for you, like getting a question wrong, or doing that thing that makes you feel embarrassed at 2am when you can't sleep. What would you say to someone you love if they said they were upset about that? You'd probably say something like "it's ok to feel what you're feeling now, but it was a mistake that happened one time. It doesn't make you less capable/clever/good at what you do." Bring that compassion back to yourself.

We're all our own worst critics because we all want to be the best we can be, whatever that looks like for us. We sometimes forget we're human, we make mistakes, we have bad days. When these things happen, remind yourself that it's ok to feel what you're feeling, and remind yourself that you are worthy, capable, and that you're doing the best you can.

Here are some resources you may find helpful:

- [Guided exercises and practices](#) from Dr Kristin Neff
- ['A 5-minute self-compassion break'](#) from Mindful
- ['Self-compassion for the self-critical'](#) from Susan David
- ['Dare to rewire your brain for self-compassion'](#) TED talk
- ['How to be kinder to yourself'](#) from Susan David

Mitigations/accommodations

If you have access needs or are at all concerned that our plans for Elections will disadvantage you or make you unduly anxious, please reach out to saelect@st-andrews.ac.uk and we will work with you to make accommodations wherever we can.

Support services

As much as self-care and self-compassion are important parts of looking after yourself, it's also important to reach out to people or services that can help you.

Speak to friends, family, or other people in your life that you trust.

You can also reach out to people at the Union who will listen to your worries, offer reassurance and where relevant help you find more appropriate services:

- You can reach out to Chase at saelect@ or cmg9@

- You can reach out to Holly (Wellbeing & Equality Co-ordinator) at hm234@
- You can reach out to Iain (HR Manager and Education Advocate) at inc@

Here are some other services within and outside the University which may help:

Student Services: Provides a range of appointments with Wellbeing Advisers, Counsellors, Cognitive Behavioural Therapists and Mental Health Coordinators. Email TheASC@st-andrews.ac.uk or phone 01334 46 2020 (Mon-Fri, 08:45am-5pm) for an appointment.

If you're experiencing difficulties related to the fact you're running for election, it's best that you email or ring the ASC and disclose that you are a candidate. Student Services will still triage based on risk, but the team know to expect that candidates will need support and will do their very best to get you the right support as soon as they can.

Outside of daytime office hours, support and help is available via 01334 46 8999. Security and Response team members can redirect you to the appropriate Student Services staff member on call.

Nightline: Phonelines are open Monday-Saturday during the semester 8pm-7am from any UK phone (01334 46 2266) and free Skype audio calls anywhere in the world (@StAndrewsNightline), Email : nightline@st-andrews.ac.uk. Instant messaging Monday-Saturday 8pm-12am during the semester.

Shout: Free UK 24hr texting service on 85258. By texting the word 'SHOUT' to 85258 you will start a conversation with a trained Shout volunteer, who will text you back and forth, sharing only what you feel comfortable with. If you live in Fife, you can text 'FIFE' to 85258.

Breathing Space: Free phone service for people in Scotland 0800838587 (Monday-Thursday 6pm-2am, Friday 6pm-Monday 6am). Webchat available Monday-Friday 6pm-2am, Saturday and Sunday 4pm-12am.