

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2016, The Students' Association Elections Committee unanimously passed the rule that stated 'current sabbatical officers are prohibited from endorsing, supporting, assisting or campaigning for any candidate'. With the creation of a petition by a member of the Association, the Elections Committee convened today, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016 to re-debate this rule with the decision being unanimously made to uphold it. It should be made clear that on page two of the elections rules it is clearly stated that 'the Elections Committee reserves the right to make changes to the rules' but that checks are in place to make sure that every candidate is made aware. This is a longstanding rule and every Elections Committee has used it at least once to clarify, change or update a current rule.

While there is no official rule stating that the Elections Committee must accept and act on petitions they felt that it was important and in the interests of transparency that they make the reasons for their decision clear.

The decision on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February to disallow campaigning by sabbatical officers was brought to the table after requests from members of the Association asking for clarification on the position of sabbatical officers during the election season. It was decided that it is very difficult to separate a sabbatical from their role and thus in turn, it is with great difficulty that fairness and absolute democracy can be maintained with the inclusion of Sabbatical endorsement.

St Andrews is a University unlike most: it's voter turnout has for many years crept near or even exceeded 50% of the electorate – figures that more than double the turnout of other universities. With this in mind, the decision of the Elections Committee is based on the knowledge that more members vote in sabbatical races than any other and that sabbatical office-holders are known by a much larger percentage of the electorate than any other (in some cases around a third of students voted in individual sabbatical races last year). On top of this, unlike any other office holder, sabbaticals email all students within the University weekly, both with information pertinent to their remit but also with their face, office title and name attached. It was discussed at length that such a public figure having the ability to unduly influence the selection of their successor can only be damaging to democratic process as it can hold others back from running and is a hugely unfair advantage to the candidate in question, more so in St Andrews than in most Student Association Elections throughout the country – it does not however, hinder that office holder from fulfilling their right to vote.

There was also a discussion during the emergency elections meeting over the ways in which sabbatical endorsement differs from an incumbent re-running for a second term. It was made clear that a re-run by a current office holder is based purely on the merit of that individual over both the course of their degree and their time as a sabbatical within the Students' Association. With the endorsement of a sabbatical however, a candidate's campaign could be seen to be based on the merit and achievements of the sabbatical rather than the individual running for the position. Sabbatical endorsement, as has already been stated, could have a much larger affect on electoral outcomes in St Andrews than in many other UK Student Association elections.

Finally, St Andrews is not alone in the disallowing of sabbatical endorsement.

Student elections in St Andrews are an exciting time and the Elections Committee is driven to making sure that our elections are democratic and enjoyable for all. Should any prospective candidate, voter or member of the Association have any queries please contact saelect@.