

Protocol for General Council Elections

Introduction

This protocol is a description of the procedures and schedules for all General Council elections in order to provide guidance to all who are involved in these elections. It has been prepared by the Constitutional Standing Committee and approved by the Business Committee of the General Council. It is an open document and is available on the website of the General Council or by request from the General Council Office.

Schedule for the elections

1. Business Committee Members – an election is held in February every year for five members
2. Court Assessors – an election is held in February every second year assuming normal terms of office. Two vacancies alternate with one vacancy per election
3. Chancellor – an election is only held when required on the retirement of the Chancellor

Regulations

All elections by the General Council membership are governed by the Regulations for General Council Elections (currently June 2011 version).

Voting System & Eligibility

The Weighted Inclusive Gregory Method (WIGM) Single Transferable Voting system is used, with the Alternative Vote system used when there is only one vacancy. All elections are supervised by the Electoral Reform Society. Both postal votes and online votes are accepted. All members of the General Council as specified in the Regulations are eligible to vote in the elections. The electoral roll is determined as those members who have registered to vote either electronically or by requesting a postal vote as at the respective closing dates for registration.

Returning Officer

The Returning Officer is the Secretary of the General Council. In case the Secretary is unable to fulfil this role for any reason the Business Committee of the General Council will appoint a substitute.

Nomination of Candidates

The methods and time schedules for the nomination of candidates are to be found in the Regulations.

Election Communications

Written information is published in *Billet* within *Edit*. Detailed information about the February elections is found in the Winter issue, usually published in early January.

Billet within Edit is also available online on the University website at <http://www.ed.ac.uk/alumni/publications/edit/introduction>

Information is also published electronically on the General Council website in the “Elections” section <http://www.general-council.ed.ac.uk/elections.htm>

A number of email or newsletter reminders will be sent out to the General Council members who have a registered email address. At a minimum these will be:

Mid-November – prior to the close of Nominations

Mid-January – at the start of electronic voting

Early February – two days before the close of electronic voting

Key dates/times for February Elections

1. Announcement in the Winter issue of *Billet* and at the Half Yearly meeting in June the previous year
2. Latest date for a public notice inviting Nominations for Court Assessors is not less than 120 days before the February Half-Yearly Meeting at which the results are to be announced
3. Closing date for Nominations not less than 80 days before the February Half-Yearly Meeting
4. Closing date for registering as a postal voter - 30 November of the year prior to the election
5. Election details in Winter issue of *Billet within Edit*
6. Postal ballot papers to be sent out with the Winter issue of the *Billet* (December of the previous year)
7. Closing date for completing registration for online voting on MyEd – four days before the February Half-Yearly Meeting at 17.00GMT
8. Closing date for receipt of postal ballot papers – 17.00GMT on the day three days before the February Half-Yearly Meeting
9. Final date for online voting – 17.00GMT on the day three days before the February Half-Yearly Meeting
10. Date for counting of votes – two days before the February Half-Yearly Meeting
11. Public Announcement of results - at the February Half Yearly Meeting

Eligibility and Procedures for Postal Ballots

1. Any member of the General Council is eligible for a postal vote in General Council elections and may request one from the General Council Office in writing or by email.
2. The procedures for requesting a postal vote are advertised in both issues of *Billet within Edit*; and on the General Council website.
3. When a request for a postal vote is received from a General Council member, it is logged on the member’s record in the ThankQ database of the General Council Register by staff in Development & Alumni. The logging is double-checked.

4. A General Council member requesting a postal vote receives a reply from the Secretary of the General Council to confirm that the request has been received and that a postal vote will be issued.
5. Requests for postal votes may be submitted at any time but must be received no later than 30 November to have effect for the elections in February of the following year. Members who register for a postal vote will continue to receive a postal vote each year until such time as the member writes to the Secretary of the General Council to cancel it.

Preparation and distribution of ballot papers

1. Ballot papers with a unique anonymous ID number, a voter declaration form with the same anonymous ID number (with clear instructions), ballot envelope (A) and prepaid reply envelope (home and overseas) (B) are designed and printed. The ballot paper clearly specifies the closing date for the return of these to the General Council Office.
2. Development & Alumni (D&A) generates a list of those who will receive ballot papers and a unique ID number for each one, using the data from those who have requested a paper ballot paper. The unique anonymous ID number is printed on the ballot paper and also on the declaration form.
3. The dataset is sorted by home and overseas and the appropriate home or overseas envelope issued to each.
4. The Publishing House encloses a ballot paper with anonymous ID number, declaration form, ballot envelope and prepaid reply envelope (a home or overseas reply-paid envelope as appropriate) in each *Edit* destined for a member who has requested a ballot paper.

Completion and return of ballot papers

1. Voter completes the ballot paper and encloses it in the ballot paper envelope (A).
2. Voter completes the voter declaration form with their name, first degree and year of graduation.
3. Voter encloses the sealed ballot paper envelope (A) and voter declaration form in the prepaid reply envelope (B) and posts it.

Logging ballot papers and voting process

1. Completed ballot paper envelopes arrive in the General Council Office.
2. Assistant to the Secretary of the General Council, in the presence of the Secretary, opens the postal envelopes and using the list provided by D&A checks the validity of the voter and logs the incoming declaration forms against their name and unique ID number.
3. Ballot envelopes are to be stored sealed in safe secure storage (“Ballot box”) until opened and counted (see “Counting of votes”)

Procedures for Electronic Ballots

1. All eligible members of General Council who wish to have an electronic vote shall have had to pre-register on the MyEd alumni portal through the EASE

- registration process. The latest date for having successfully done so will be at least four days before the day of the February Half-Yearly Meeting.
2. Electronic voting will be available from 30 days before the close of voting.
 3. Those wishing to vote will logon through EASE using their unique username and password. They should then click through and enter the MyEd Portal.
 4. Upon entering MyEd they will see their normal Welcome Screen. There will be a specific section on this page labelled "On Line Elections". They will click on this and it will take them to an election page showing a list of current online elections, one of which will be "General Council Elections".
 5. On the General Council Election first page there will be a list of the positions available for voting (General Council Business Committee Election and General Council Assessor Election).
 6. Selecting either position will display the relevant ballot paper. Each candidate listed will have a photograph, a candidate statement and personal information and clicking on their name will link through to this.
 7. Voters will complete the ballot paper indicating their preferences (1, 2, 3 etc). Voters do not have to express more than one preference. The system does not allow voters to cast an invalid vote. Voters will be able to revise their vote until such time as the polls close.

Procedures for Counting of Votes

1. The online voting system is 'primed' by University of Edinburgh Information Services (IS) with an electronic copy of the electorate provided by D&A, so that only those eligible to vote can do so.
2. IS will screen out those people who have registered for a postal vote from the electronic electorate so that they cannot vote online. Note: This will result in usernames of postal voters being known to people outside D&A. This is a function that IS already undertakes for the University Rectorial Elections.
3. At the election count IS will enter the postal votes and a final audit check is run by the system to verify that no member has managed to submit both a postal vote and an electronic vote. This is to allow for the possibility of human error in section 2 above.
4. In order for the final audit to work it must be possible to match the electronic username of each manual voter to the ballot paper returned, this is why there must be a voter ID number on the ballot paper.
5. Voting count is then run as the data now includes the postal votes as well as the online votes.
6. In the event of a failure of the computer systems or of the power supply then the count will take place as soon as is practically possible thereafter and the deadline for the election will be extended.
7. In the extremely unlikely event that double voting (the same person voting both on-line and by postal ballot) has occurred then the on-line vote will be used.

Supervision of the Count

A representative of the Electoral Reform Society will be present at the count and will ensure that the proper procedures are followed and the results verified.

Announcement of Results

The results will be announced at the February Half Yearly Meeting. Immediately thereafter the University Secretary will be notified. All candidates whether successful or unsuccessful will be notified individually by letter as soon as possible following the Meeting.

A list of successful candidates will be posted on the General Council website and in the Summer issue of *Billet* within *Edit*, and the full results sheet will also be made available to candidates on request and will be published on the General Council website.

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