



Introduction

It is a requirement of the Education Act (1994) Part II, that the Governing Body of the University of Sheffield ensures Sheffield SU's compliance with certain conditions provided by The Act, including ensuring that the SU is operated in a fair and democratic manner and is accountable for its finances. The primary mechanism for this undertaking is the development and monitoring of a Code of Practice, which was reviewed as recently as Summer 2023 and is provided within the University Calendar.

2026 Officer Elections

This year's Officer Elections demonstrated strong performance against key participation targets, with turnout exceeding expectations and all roles contested. The continued shift towards positioning elections as both a democratic process and a recruitment campaign has begun to embed more effectively, particularly through changes to the applications process and candidate framing. There were clear strengths in the use of data to inform candidate engagement, improvements in accessibility of information, and a more streamlined training offer. However, challenges remain in broadening the candidate pool beyond highly engaged students, strengthening early engagement and narrative building, and ensuring consistency in candidate support and communications. Operationally, the elections ran smoothly, with minimal rule breaches and a generally positive campaigning environment. The use of digital communications and targeted outreach continued to drive engagement, though there is further opportunity to refine cost effectiveness and channel strategy.

The Elections Steering Group set a number of key performance indicators to guide the 2026 election cycle, building on delivery from 2025 and aligning more closely with the Students' Union strategy.

- Performance was strong in several areas. Turnout reached 20.4 percent, exceeding the 20 percent target and representing a year on year increase. All roles were contested, with at least three candidates per position, and representation across all faculties was achieved. There was also notable progress in postgraduate participation, with candidates standing across multiple roles beyond Education Officer.
- However, candidate numbers fell slightly short of the target, with 49 applicants against a goal of 50, and a more significant drop to 35 candidates completing the campaign due to withdrawals. Peer and staff recommendations also declined considerably compared to previous years, suggesting a need to strengthen early engagement strategies.
- Progress has been made in repositioning elections as a marketing led campaign. The shift towards storytelling, candidate visibility, and alignment with broader SU work has begun, though this was not yet fully realised.
- There remains an opportunity to further embed Officers in year round communications, strengthen early narrative building, and create clearer momentum leading into the elections period.
- The reframing of elections as a job application process has been successfully implemented. The move away from manifestos towards structured, evidence based questions improved clarity and encouraged more thoughtful responses. However, there is a tension between



professionalisation and accessibility. Some candidates felt constrained by the format, and there is a risk that the process may deter those without prior SU experience.

- There has been clear progress in embedding data into the elections process. Candidate questions were informed by SU and sector data, and campaign decisions increasingly considered metrics such as cost per vote. Further work is needed to move from retrospective analysis to proactive, real time data use in targeting and engagement.

The Candidates

A total of 49 candidates applied, with 35 completing the campaign process. Withdrawals were due to a range of factors including academic commitments, financial considerations, and wellbeing.

- Candidate distribution across roles was strong, particularly for SU President, which attracted the highest number of applications. Engagement pathways remain consistent, with society members and committee members forming a large proportion of candidates.
- Diversity data indicates progress in some areas, particularly postgraduate representation, though further work is required to ensure broader representation across demographics.
- There is also evidence that financial and perceived role challenges may be discouraging some potential candidates, highlighting a need to better communicate the value and support of the roles.
- The campaigning period lasted just under seven days, which candidates generally felt was appropriate. The structure supported candidate wellbeing, though there was a perceived dip in momentum at the start of the period.
- Society engagement remains a key challenge, with candidates reporting difficulty securing endorsements despite improved guidance. Greater incentive and structured engagement opportunities for societies should be explored.
- Overall, campaigning was conducted positively, with strong candidate engagement and minimal issues.

Voting

- Voting performance was strong, supported by a multi channel communications strategy. Email remained the most effective driver of engagement, with clear spikes following sends.
- SMS and push notifications contributed to turnout, particularly in generating short term spikes, and represent good value for money when considered on a cost per vote basis.
- Digital improvements enhanced user experience, with a more student centred and visually engaging approach. However, opportunities remain to further personalise and humanise content.

Rules and complaints

- The rules framework functioned effectively, with a relatively low number of complaints and no formal sanctions required. Most issues related to early campaigning on social media, indicating a need for clearer guidance in this area.
- Improvements to printing and sustainability rules were broadly successful, though further clarification is required to prevent confusion and ensure compliance.



- The introduction of a consolidated Candidate Debrief session provided a valuable space for reflection and feedback. Engagement was moderate, and feedback highlighted the importance of accessibility, timing, and inclusivity.
- There were fewer complaints and concerns raised compared to previous years, suggesting improvements in candidate support and clarity of process.

Returning Officer's Report

It is incumbent upon the University Council to assure itself that SU elections are conducted in a fair and democratic manner. This assurance is provided by the report of the external Returning Officer, a service provided by NUS Charitable Services Ltd. That report is provided at appendix A.

Sheffield Student Assembly

Work with Sheffield Hallam Students' Union continues through the Sheffield Students' Assembly partnership. The Assembly brings together the city's Students' Unions to amplify the collective voice of students and advocate on issues affecting student life across Sheffield. The initiative aims to provide students with a space to share experiences, discuss challenges, and engage directly with decision makers. Through these events, students are able to interact with powerholders and contribute to campaigns and lobbying activity designed to improve the material conditions of students in the city.

Sheffield is a diverse and vibrant city, attracting students from across the UK and around the world. Students play an important role in the life, growth and success of the city. By working collaboratively as the voice of students in Sheffield, the partnership aims to improve the student experience across a range of issues, including academic interests, student living conditions, civic participation, transport, safety and belonging. The Assembly events act as the central space for this work. Through deliberation, story sharing and networking, these sessions create opportunities for students to shape campaigns and influence decision making.

The first Assembly took place in November and focused on three priority areas identified by students:

- Public transport
- Night time safety
- International students' rights

The second Assembly session took place in March and focused on public transport. The discussion explored issues including campus bus routes and the availability and reliability of night time transport services. The aim is to move towards clearer recommendations and specific policy asks. We had attendance from senior representatives from First Bus and Stagecoach, alongside other local decision makers. The event provided students with an opportunity to share their experiences and contribute directly to discussions about improving transport provision in Sheffield. The next Assembly will have a focus on nighttime safety.

Alongside this work, we recently hosted another MP drop in surgery with Abtisam Mohamed MP. A number of student queries related to the ongoing student finance campaign she is working on with other backbench MPs.

We are also planning further engagement with Sheffield City Council, including participation in a forthcoming budget discussion session with local councillors. In addition, we will support the voter registration campaign currently being led by one of our Officers, Laura, to encourage greater democratic participation among students.



Student Communities

Our research has shown that engagement with the SU is a key factor in determining how students feel about their time at university. Our strategic impacts of 'belonging' and 'influence' are both massively boosted if a student engages with us.

Our research also shows that one of the most powerful forms of engagement is society membership and participation in our activities. When asking for nominations for the upcoming Activities Awards (May 16th) we gave students the opportunity to let us know what the SU's activities and opportunities mean to them. We received over 90 testimonials, all of them positive. A sample of these are included below.

Students who engage with the SU report **influence scores 7–23 percentage points higher across every measure.**

Students who engage with the SU report **belonging scores 30–45 percentage points higher across every measure.**

On belonging and friendship

"At an event a member came up to our President and said that the Sapphic Society was so important to them — as a first year they were really daunted by meeting new people, but at the events run by the Sapphic Society, she had met both of her best friends." — Sapphic Society member

"As an Asian Muslim hijabi, at first I felt like an outlier, but our shared interests in medieval martial arts, history and culture sparked up cool and meaningful interactions." — Medieval Reenactment Society member

On personal development

"Being a part of Sports Committee has taught me so much about working with a group of people. As the Disabled Student Representative, it has helped me learn more about myself and how to help others in a sensitive and comforting way — something that I will carry throughout the rest of my life." — Sports Committee member

"I joined USIS through the Twikker Fund in my first year and was thrilled to be part of such a supportive community, which has personally helped me get to where I want to be — I'm looking forward to moving to London to join Standard Chartered Bank on an FX Trading desk." — Investment Society member



On community impact

"Bummit received an email: 'Just emailing to say a huge thank you — me and my partner are staying in a room sponsored by you at Sheffield Children's Hospital while our son is on the critical care unit. You've really made a difference.'" — Bummit (charity hitchhike society)

"I have been a part of ANTS for 4 years. Having faced my own bereavements, it's been so amazing to have a place to put my own feelings, as well as learn new tools from the children — an aspect I didn't expect but absolutely value. I know the Sheffield community is too." — ANTS (bereavement support volunteering project) member

On the international student experience

"I've been part of ISC for 4 years — it's been the best part of my student experience and what led me to run to be an Officer. The people I've met through ISC encourage me to keep fighting for international students and migrants in general. I'm so thankful for that." — International Students' Committee member

On Jewish-Muslim relations

"JSOC has provided amazing opportunities to meet other Jews and take part in incredible events. A special achievement was gaining better relations with the Islamic Circle — something that has not occurred before — and this has led to us completing events together, bringing positivity to both our societies." — Jewish Society member

Appendix A: Returning Officer's Report for the 2026 Officer Elections

Returning Officers Report:

SU Officer Elections 2026

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1. Summary of Results

Between **4th and 5th March 2026** votes for the following were held concurrently:

- 6 Full Time Students' Union Officers
- 1 Elected Student Trustee
- 1 Referenda Question

[The full ballot files for each election can be found here.](#) The final results of these elections were:

Full Time Officers

SU President (Democracy & Community) [10 Candidates, 3,943 votes]	Sam Omondi (she/they), with 2046 votes
Education Officer [5 Candidates, 3,471 votes]	Lola-Mae Till (she/her), with 1,478 votes
Liberation & Activities Officer [5 Candidates, 2,927 votes]	Avis Azari (they/them), with 1463 votes
Wellbeing & Sports Officer [4 Candidates, 3,168 votes]	Amelia Desouza (she/her), with 1,783 votes
Sustainability & Development Officer [3 Candidates, 2,700 votes]	Anna James (she/her), with 1301 votes
International & Welfare Officer [3 Candidates, 3,064 votes]	Sana Memon (she/her), with 1645 votes

Elected Student Trustee

Elected Student Trustee [3 Candidates, 2,197 votes]	Ayush Soni (he/him), with 1,500 votes
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Referenda

Sheffield Students' Union remain a member of the National Union of Students UK or leave?

- Total Votes: 2,720
- Yes: 1,442
- No: 1,003
- Abstain: 275

2. Election Support

Election Officials / SU Staff Support	
External Returning Officer [RO] <i>Responsible for the proper conduct of the election; an external body or individual with no connection to the SU or to candidates.</i>	The National Union of Students
Deputy Returning Officer [DRO] <i>Responsible for the day to day good conduct and administration of the elections, and any other responsibilities delegated to them by the RO.</i>	Mems Ayinla (Director of Student Influence)
Advisory Staff <i>To advise on all aspects of SU Elections, including Elections Regulations.</i>	Emily Tabern (Student Influence Coordinator)
Candidate Buddies <i>Staff members available to each candidate</i>	Candidates will be assigned a member of SU or University staff as a 'Buddy' for the election - to speak to and ask for advice.

[An Elections Steering Group](#) was formed to support the day-to-day delivery of the SU Officer Elections, and consisted of Students' Union staff. The group was responsible for planning and delivering all operational aspects of the election, in line with steer provided by the strategy of the SU, and feedback gathered from previous elections.

3. Election Schedule

This year's election period schedule was as follows:

Spring Election Timetable [Full Time Officers]	
Publication of Notice	Friday 30th January
Nominations Open	Monday 2nd February
Nominations Close	Friday 13th February, 4pm
Candidate Briefing	Monday 16th February, 5.30pm
Candidate Training Weeks	Monday 16th to Thursday 26th February
Candidate Questions Deadline	Thursday 26th February
Campaign Launch / Candidates Announced	Friday 27th February
Voting Opens / Launch	Wednesday 4th March, 8am
Voting Closes	Thursday 5th March, 10pm
Results Announced	Friday 6th March, 6pm [Foundry]

4. Voter Turnout

'Voter turnout' refers to the total number of eligible students who voted in the elections. Voter turnout in these elections was 5,419 voters, 20.4% of the student population.

Election Year	Student Population	Voter Turnout	Percentage Turnout
2020/21 (FTO elections only)	32,013	5,479	17%
2020/21 (PTO elections only)	32,013	1,159	4%
2021/22	30,129	4,614	16%
2022/23	32,982	6,860	20.7%
2023/24	33,377	6,979	21%
2024/25	29,871	5,728	19.2%
2025/26	26,758	5,419	20.4%

The voter turnout per election was as follows:

Election	Voter Turnout 2024	Voter Turnout 2025**	2026
SU President (Democracy & Community)	4,308 (SU President)	3,535	3,943
Activities & Liberation Officer	3,056 (Activities & Development) 2,451 (Liberation)	2,553	2,927
Education Officer	2,931	3,135	3,471
International & Welfare Officer	2,744 (International & Community) 2,723 (Welfare & Sustainability)	2,728	3,064
Wellbeing & Sport Officer	2,685	2,697	3,168
Sustainability & Development Officer	2,723 (Welfare & Sustainability)	2,597	2,700
Elected Student Trustee	2,096	2,450	2,197
<i>Average Turnout Per Role</i>	<i>2,874</i>	<i>2,814 (-60)</i>	<i>3,067</i>
Total Turnout	6,979	5,728	3,943

5. Candidates

As with voting, there was a concern that we would see a significant reduction in candidate numbers (beyond simply the reduction caused by fewer roles being available). At the opening of polling candidate numbers were as follows;

Election	2024	2025	2026	Difference
SU President (Democracy & Community)	11	9	10	+1
Liberation & Activities Officer	5 (Activities & Development)	9	5	-4
Education Officer	4	5	5	0
International & Welfare Officer	6 (International & Community)	10	6	-4
Wellbeing & Sport Officer	2	2	4	+2
Sustainability & Development Officer	5 (Welfare & Sustainability)	9	3	-6
Liberation Officer	3	N/A	N/A	38 Total PTO Candidates
BAME Students' Officer	12			
Disabled Students' Officer	4			
LGBT+ Students' Officer	4			
Mature Students' Officer	4			
Women Students' Officer	11			

Elected Student Trustee	4 (x2 Trustee Roles)	3	2	+2
Total	75	47	35	-12
Average Candidates Per Position	5.4	6.7		+1.3

**Nearest Equivalent Roles*

6. Election Rules and Complaints

[The Supplementary Election Rules](#) were approved in advance in line of the election (and used in the Autumn Election cycle as well). All candidates agreed to the rules as a compulsory requirement, and were required to undertake a rules briefing prior to campaigning.

The Returning Officer received 1 formal complaint during the elections. This is in comparison with 11 complaints being received in 2025,

SU Officer Elections 2026 Summary of Complaints:

Rule	Complaints Received
1. Candidates are expected to treat each other with respect and must not campaign in a way that causes deliberate and personal harm or damage to other members.	1
3. Candidates may not begin campaigning until they have attended a briefing and agreed to follow these rules. Additional guidance on campaigning can be found here.	0
4. Candidates must not : a. seek to influence or deliberately observe a member who is engaged in the act of voting (including looking at their phone/laptop screen while they vote) b. cast a vote for someone else, with or without their consent (including handling their phone/laptop to vote, or logging them in on your own device) c. offer a cash bribe or goods in return for votes (sweets or similar incentives can be used as a conversation starter, but not given in return for a vote) d. move, remove or alter another candidate's campaign materials (physical or digital)	0

The complaint was regarding the use of social media accounts and not being in line with rule 1. The nature of complaints and concerns surrounding this suggest it needs to be reviewed/amended for 2027. The RO will be working to review social media guidelines as this is the main area where complaints are raised.

No complaints resulted in formal sanctions, and none were referred to the External Returning Officer.

7. External Returning Officer's Report

The elections were agreed by the Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officer to be fair and properly conducted.

You can see the External Returning Officer report from the National Union of Students in full below:

 [The University of Sheffield Students Union Returning Officer Report.pdf](#)

 [The University of Sheffield Students Union Returning Officer Report Officer Elections 09.03.26.pdf](#)

Mems Ayinla (Director of Student Influence) - Deputy Returning Officer
Peter Robertson (NUS Charity Director) - External Returning Officer