

## **Protocol for General Council Elections**

### **Introduction**

This protocol is a description of the procedures and schedules for all General Council elections compiled 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 on request from the General Council Office.

### **Schedule for the Elections**

1. Business Committee Members – an election is held in February every year usually for five members
2. Chancellor – an election is held only 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*.

### **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. If 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*. Detailed information about the February elections is found in the Winter issue, usually distributed to General Council members in early January. *Billet* can also be accessed on the General Council website <http://www.general-council.ed.ac.uk>

Calls for nominations and information about elections are published in the electronic newsletter for alumni – *Enlightened*.

Calls for nominations and detailed information about elections are also published on the General Council website in the “Elections” section <http://www.general-council.ed.ac.uk/elections.htm>

### **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. Closing date for Nominations - not less than 80 days before the February Half-Yearly Meeting
3. The closing date (in November) for registering for a postal vote will be published in the Summer issue of *Billet* and on the General Council website
4. Election details are published in the Winter issue of *Billet*
5. Postal ballot papers will be sent out with the Winter issue of the *Billet*
6. Closing date for completing registration for online voting on MyEd – at 17.00GMT on the day four days before the February Half-Yearly Meeting
7. Closing date for receipt of postal ballot papers – 17.00GMT on the day that is three days before the February Half-Yearly Meeting
8. Final date for online voting – 17.00GMT on the day that is four days before the February Half-Yearly Meeting
9. Date for counting of votes – three days before the February Half-Yearly Meeting
10. 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*; 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 i.e. the General Council Register, by staff in Development & Alumni(D&A). 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 the published November deadline, 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. 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 *Billet* destined for a member who has requested a postal 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 Validation of the Postal 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.
3. There will be a spreadsheet with a list of those issued with a postal vote, as supplied by D&A Operations to the General Council. This will include the voter's alumni or staff number, name and address, date of birth and columns for Postal Vote Received and Declaration of Identity Validated. These last two columns have yes or no answers entered to them once the Declaration is checked for the validity of the voter by the Assistant to the Secretary. If ballot

papers are numbered consecutively rather than using ThankQ Serial number, then another column needs to be added to this audit list so that the ballot paper number can be added to the record during validation

4. The process for dealing with any irregularities discovered upon opening of the outer envelopes will be as follows:
  - a) When the large envelope (B) is received and opened to check the Declaration of Identity is valid, no Declaration of Identity is found but there is a ballot paper envelope (A). A person independent of the election process will open the ballot paper envelope and retrieve the Declaration of Identity if present and pass this to the Assistant Secretary. The Assistant Secretary will then log its receipt and check the validity of the voter as normal. The Independent Person will immediately reseal the ballot paper envelope with the ballot paper inside it and it is put into a secure box containing such resealed ballot papers. If there is no Declaration of Identity at all then the ballot is not valid and the ballot paper is placed in a separate secure box which will contain all invalid ballots.
  - b) The ballot paper may be included in the large envelope (B) but not within the ballot paper envelope (A). This becomes immediately apparent when the large envelope is opened to extract the Declaration of Identity. The Assistant to the Secretary or the Secretary will immediately put the ballot paper back into the large envelope (B) and reseal it, ensuring that the correct ballot paper number is on this envelope. The envelope (A) will be opened to look for the Declaration of Identity if this has not already been found in the outer envelope. If the Declaration of Identity is present and the identity is valid, the resealed envelope with the ballot paper inside will be placed in the secure box containing all resealed ballot papers. If no such Declaration of Identity is present the ballot paper will not be valid and it will be placed in the secure box which contains all invalid ballots.

All resealed envelopes will be signed and dated by the person who opened or sealed them.

5. Final decisions on the validity of all opened and resealed ballot envelopes will be taken jointly by the Returning Officer and the Electoral Reform Society representative.
6. The decisions on the validity of all postal votes will be finalised by 17.00 GMT on the day before the actual count. The General Council office then passes the spreadsheet data to the person responsible at the University of Edinburgh Information Services (IS) who will use it to compare with the master list of the electorate as part of the final voter validation procedures.
7. Ballot envelopes other than those exceptions mentioned above are to be kept sealed in safe secure storage ("Ballot boxes") until opened and counted (see "Procedures for 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 five 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 "Online 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 (i.e. General Council Business Committee Election and/or Chancellor).
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.
8. In the event of a failure of the computer systems or of the power supply affecting the deadline for online voting the deadline for receipt of electronic votes will be proportionately extended.

### **Procedures for Counting of Votes**

1. The online voting system is 'primed' by 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 postal voter to the ballot paper returned, this is why there must be a voter ID number on the postal 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 delaying the count, then the count will take place as soon as is practically possible thereafter to enable the results to be announced at the Half Yearly Meeting.

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.
8. The results for each election will be entered on to a formal election result sheet which shall include information as to votes cast, votes rejected as invalid, total electorate, and allocation of preference votes by candidate with indication of those successfully elected. This sheet will be printed and then signed by the Returning Officer and Electoral Reform Society representative.

### **Post-election Storage**

Ballot papers will be stored for one year in the General Council Office. IS will be asked to provide a digital record of the election data for filing in the Elections file.

### **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*. The full results sheet will also be made available to candidates on request and will be published on the General Council website.