

**UMSU International  
Annual General Election, 2024**

**6-10 May 2024**

**Report of the Returning Officer**



Above Quota Elections Pty Ltd  
[abovequota.com.au](http://abovequota.com.au)

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## **Summary**

Above Quota Elections (AQE) were engaged to run the University of Melbourne Student Union's (UMSU's) 2024 elections. UMSU runs a number of elections each year; the annual general election for UMSU International is the subject of this report.

UMSU International sets the dates for their annual election. This year polling ran from 6th May to 10th May, slightly earlier than last year. Patrick Clearwater was the Returning Officer and Stephen Luntz was Deputy Returning Officer.

The UMSU International annual election encompasses the election of all members of UMSU International's Central Committee. The Central Committee consists of 29 positions, categorised into executives, directors, and officers. Elections are run under the auspices of UMSU's election rules, most relevantly, the UMSU International Regulations, the UMSU International Electoral Regulations, and the UMSU Constitution.

The elections were run online, with BigPulse used as the electronic services provider, as has been the case since 2020.

The nomination period ran from 8th April to 24th April. Nominations were fewer in comparison to the year previous, with 57 valid nominations received, compared to 90 in 2023. However, only one position received no nominations.

Despite the decrease in the number of nominations, turnout marginally increased: this year's election saw a total of 1316 votes across the week (compared to 1271 in 2023). All international students are eligible to vote, and voting links were again sent to student email addresses.

New this year were regulations providing for a short statement and a photo from each candidate to appear on the ballot.

In general, candidate conduct was good during the election. As usual we received a variety of complaints, but none rose to the seriousness of some of the conduct observed in 2023. Social media remains an area of concern (although all candidates and campaigners endeavoured to remain within the rules) and we make some recommendations in that area.

## **Nominations**

As done the last year, nominations were collected online and we used the same process to collect nominator and seconder consent. All nominators and seconders were emailed personalised links to click in order to confirm their consent. Once again this process worked smoothly, with no reports of confirmation emails going missing.

We offered an extended deadline for the consent confirmation process — candidates had an additional 24 hours (after the nomination deadline) to have their nominator/seconders confirm they had nominated/seconded. However, the Regulations are clear that the actual nominating/seconding must happen before the deadline, so we could not allow a change of nominator/seconders after the deadline. This extension, which aligned the confirmation process with the deadline for policy statements and photos, reduced the last-minute rush and allowed us to concentrate on assisting candidates with more fundamental issues with their nominations.

However, as with last year, the “nominator/seconders must not be a candidate” rule caused problems and required several last minute changes of nominator/seconders. In one instance this year a nomination had to be rejected. Whilst the prospective candidate bears some of the blame for submitting their nomination three minutes before the deadline, it is almost certain that given the opportunity, another nominator could have been found. We discuss this in the recommendations.

In total 61 nominations were received. Three of these were not valid, and one was withdrawn after close of nominations but before polling opened, resulting in 57 nominations proceeding to the election.

## **Prospective candidates’ information session**

UMSU International historically has organised an information session for candidates, typically featuring presentations from incumbent committee members. This year, this session was run entirely by Above Quota and no presentations from incumbents were planned or made. The session was held at 4pm on Wednesday 17th April, about halfway through the nomination period.

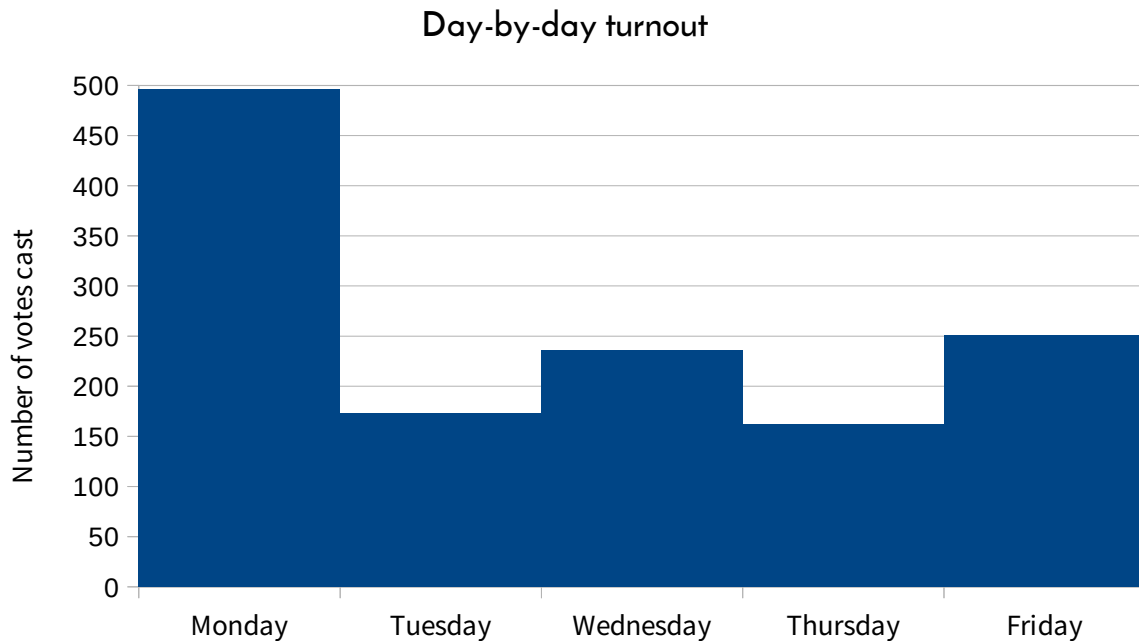
The session was well-attended, with a significant fraction of future candidates coming along. This gave us the opportunity to introduce ourselves to most candidates in advance.

The session was recorded and posted on the website for the benefit of those unable to attend.

## **Polling**

Polling opened at 9am on Monday 6th May and ran through the week to 5pm on Friday 10th May. Polling was online, through the BigPulse platform, with all eligible voters pre-registered and automatically receiving a voting link via their student email. No provision was made for attendance, postal, or proxy voting.

All international students enrolled in a higher education award course are eligible, as are all current members of the UMSU International Committee.



*Figure 1: Votes cast day-by-day during polling week. Note Monday is only 15 hours of polling and Friday is only 17 hours of polling.*

A persistent problem with online elections at the University of Melbourne has been slow receipt and delivery of the voting invitation emails by the University's email server. For last year's UMSU September election, we were able to convince University IT to adjust their mail server to remove the throttle that had previously applied. It appears this is still in effect, as we received no reports of ballots being received late, and a spot-check showed most students had theirs on Monday morning.

Reminder emails were sent on the Wednesday and Friday of polling week. The final turnout was 1 316 voters; a day-by-day breakdown can be seen in Figure 1. Last year we did not observe a strong bump in turnout when reminder emails were sent, however, this year the reminder emails seemed more effective. It's not clear why this is, although we invested more attention in developing three distinctive emails this year. Turnout was somewhat up from last year, this year setting a new record for online turnout. Nonetheless, turnout remains below some of the records set during paper attendance voting.

The minimum 500 votes for the election to be valid was passed just after midnight on Monday.

We were available to help voters in Room 201 of Building 168 on Parkville campus. This was a nicer office than last year (when we set up at a table near the Info Desk), although somewhat less accessible to voters. We advertised the hours as 10am–3pm daily, although in practice were available from 9am–5pm.

## **Policy speech session**

The Policy Speech Session was held on the evening of 2nd May, starting at 5pm. Every executive and director candidate was invited to make a speech, and all candidates were given an opportunity to answer questions from the audience.

The session was held on the Parkville campus, in the Sunderland Theatre. It was primarily designated as an in-person session, although we offered a Zoom option for candidates who were unable to attend physically.

The session was recorded and posted on the election website. This year, given the length of the session we edited the recording to remove some pauses, and to add name straps. This took some extra time but made the recording more accessible; as it is outside the tender scope, in the future we will assess on a year-by-year basis if we have resources to do so again.

As we said in last year's report, the main challenge facing the Policy Speech Session is its length. Even with fewer candidates than last year, it still ran for over three hours. In some ways this is something UMSU International can be proud of, as it shows significant engagement with the election process. However, it is a long evening for candidates, and so some consideration of the evening's format is warranted.

## **Results**

The provisional declaration of results was made on the evening of 10th May, posted on the website, and emailed out to candidates. A copy is attached as an appendix to this report.

The Regulations allow a one academic day period for appeals to be made to the Electoral Tribunal against the results of the election. None were received.

## **Complaints**

Generally candidate conduct was good this year. Complaints can be conveniently divided into two categories, as detailed below.

The first related to social media: where by far the most common complaint was re-sharing (sometimes with additional comments) of candidate material by non-campaigners. The UMSU International Electoral Regulations prohibit this. However, because it is a normal use of social media (and because most of the re-sharers would very likely have been entirely unaware of the Electoral Regulations) it is not uncommon. Our approach, except where we suspected the resharing was organised by the candidate, was simply to ask the material be taken down, and subsequent compliance was high. We make some recommendations around this later in the report.

The second related to the use of UMSU International resources: in one case, the staff printer, and in the second case, group chats created by UMSU International to organise events/international student ambassadors. The case was put to us that in both instances that the candidates concerned had simply misunderstood the application of the Regulations. Nevertheless, given the seriousness of the breach of trust, we imposed penalties.

## **Recommendations**

Pleasingly, most recommendations from last year's report have been considered and, where appropriate, implemented. This made this year's election easier to run and more democratic.

### **Streamline the nomination/seconding process**

The requirement that nominator/seconders cannot be candidates introduces significant risk to the nomination process. Someone can nominate and receive a message from us indicating that their nomination is provisionally accepted. Then at the last minute, their nominator/seconders may nominate as well, retroactively rendering the first candidate's nomination invalid.

We recommend reviewing whether the requirement that a nominator/seconders not be a candidate meets UMSU International's policy objectives and, if not, removing it. If maintained, we recommend adding a short period (to be set by the Returning Officer) after the nomination deadline where a different nominator/seconders can be substituted.

### **Modernise rules around campaigning**

The rules around campaigning have evolved over the years, usually by adding new rules to cover single issues, or to tweak what is and isn't allowed. Usually this has improved the Regulations — we note, for example, the new section on prohibited conduct has worked very well. The result, however, is a patchwork, and one that is not especially technology-neutral, which provokes some challenges as social media platforms evolve.

As an example, EReg 12.5 references a "like and share" of campaign material. This is becoming anachronistic (many platforms use "reactions" rather than "likes") and also suffers from a drift in meaning. To give effect to this clause, the Returning Officer this year made the decision to interpret "share" to mean "repost to the social media user's generally-accessible feed". However, most platforms offer this option as well as the option to retarget material to an individual or specific group (which we felt fell outside what was meant by "share" when the Regulation was written).

We recommend:

- The rules on campaigning be consolidated, reorganised logically, and rewritten in a way that doesn't refer to specific technologies;

- We recommend that the second sentence of EReg 12.2 be re-written to say “Campaigning includes any organised course of action...”, to keep the current definition but ensure it is clear that the normal meaning of the word is still captured; and
- We recommend that a section be added that clearly outlines what campaign activities are permitted by (a) candidates, (b) their campaign representatives, (c) other students, and (d) non-students (and we recommend non-students continue to be prohibited from campaigning).

One constant difficulty on social media is that candidates’ friends (who are not registered campaigners) will naturally interact with or reshare those candidates’ material. This poses a problem as those uninvolved friends are unlikely to know the rules, and whilst their actions are not out of malice we still have to write to the candidates and request their friends’ posts be removed. As well as us doing this having an air of artificiality, it tends to give a (small) advantage to candidates who are less diligent about following our directions to police their social media.

We recommend this be given some attention, for example by placing in the rules permission for any student to re-share candidate material as long as it is reshared generally (not sent to specific individuals) and is not posted repetitively. (Candidates and representatives should continue to be prohibited from inducing or encouraging this.)

## **Consider a return to in-person polling**

This recommendation substantially restates the same recommendation from last year.

We recommend UMSU International give serious consideration to returning to in-person polling with paper ballots, including a significantly-expanded online hybrid option for students who need it.

In this model polling stations would be established on the Parkville campus (we tentatively suggest two: in Building 168 and near The Spot). Most students would vote at those polling places, at which paper ballots would be issued and private and secure voting locations provided, as was done in 2019 and before. Additionally, postal voting would be replaced by online voting, with significantly expanded eligibility. For example, students who are: out of the country, who study at campuses other than Parkville, who are unable to attend campus, or who are sick during polling week would be eligible to apply for an online vote.

There are two principal benefits of this model. The first is to improve engagement between the organisation and the voters: by providing a focal point for campaigning, voters will be exposed to a greater diversity of candidates. It is also reasonable to expect that a return to paper polling will mean voters are more likely to investigate and vote for positions across the ballot, rather than just vote for a single position.



The second benefit is security: because polling places are under the control of the Returning Officer, voters can be assured a safe and private place to vote. This would eliminate many of the problems that have been seen in online elections throughout the country, including UMSU International last year.

We suggest the tender process include provisions requiring the Returning Officer to minimise the environmental impact of paper polling.

Undoubtedly, a paper election will come at an increased cost to UMSU. This cost may be more modest than one might expect, due to savings from using a cheaper online polling provider for the smaller number of students, and by keeping the number of polling places limited and their opening hours highly-targeted at student traffic patterns. Nevertheless, we believe that improved voter engagement and security outweighs the increased financial burden.

We recommend this option be given very serious consideration, and are happy to provide further advice.

## **Consult about changes to the Policy Speech Session**

We continue to regard the Policy Speech Session as an important part of UMSU International elections and argue for its retention.

However, its length provokes three issues:

- (a) Even though it does run for hours, many candidates (particularly for Officer positions) get only a short opportunity to speak;
- (b) By the time we get to positions lower on the ballot, people are starting to lose attention; and
- (c) It is very difficult to equitably share questions around the room, particularly when (for reasons of time) we must limit them strictly. Additionally, the Returning Officer is not well-placed to adjudicate question-time, including making determinations such as appropriateness of questions or which positions should receive more question time.

We recommend that UMSU International consults about these matters and makes appropriate changes to the format of the Policy Speech Session.

## **Technical amendments**

We recommend that the Regulations (references given herein as Reg ...) and Electoral Regulations (references given herein as EReg ...) be reviewed with a view to reorganisation, cleaning up terminology and making them more audience-focused.

Some specific short recommendations:

- Regs 8.4, 8.7–8.10, the corresponding byelection rules in Reg 9, and Reg 10.1 better belong in the Electoral Regulations.
- We question the practicality of Reg 8.11(a), and suggest Reg 8.11 be removed in its entirety
- We recommend EReg 7.1 be amended to say “Nominations must be submitted to the Returning Officer in a manner that will be advertised on the UMSU International website”
- The references to “section 18” in ERegs 12.8 and 13.4(b) should be updated to “Electoral Regulation 19”
- EReg 12.7(d) prohibits the use of “mailing lists and public online forums”. We recommend as a matter of urgency this section be made technology neutral, or at least that (i) large group chats be added to it, and (ii) “public online forums” be changed to “broad-audience online forums” to ensure they capture cases where the forum may technically be limited (e.g. to first-year students) but has such a broad audience it falls within the policy intent of the Regulation

## Declaration

I declare that the 2024 University of Melbourne Student Union International annual general election was conducted and administered with impartiality by myself and the directors and staff of Above Quota Elections Pty Ltd.

Patrick Clearwater  
Returning Officer

## Acknowledgements

A number of people helped us deliver a smooth and successful election this year, and we are immensely grateful for that assistance. Special thanks to:

- UMSU International staff, particularly Josh Davis who was our point of contact with UMSU International, and their current committee
- Other UMSU staff, particularly the Info Desk for loans of supplies

- Katherine and the staff at BigPulse
- The University of Melbourne, particularly the student enrolments team for their assistance both in providing the roll and responding to our many inquiries
- The candidates, campaigners and voters for their participation

We wish the elected candidates the best of luck in their coming term.

## Appendix A: Provisional list of nominations received

This document lists nominations received as of the close of nominations 5pm, Wednesday 24th April 2024, in the order they will appear on the ballot paper. The random draw for ballot order was done on Friday 26th April in presence of scrutineers.

Candidates are asked to contact the returning officer if they have any queries about their nomination, or the spelling of their name.

Name	Position	Note
Wasif Rahman Safin	President	
Damien Wei Hao Toh	President	
Yuxuan Liu	Vice-President (Education and Welfare)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Shruthi Tharmia Prabhushankar	Vice-President (Cultural and Social)	
Korakot Saingam (Kayden)	Vice-President (Cultural and Social)	
Jesslyn Alexis Andriono	Vice-President (Media and Marketing)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Bhavuk Virmani	Secretary	
Qi Evelyn Wang	Secretary	
Seoyoun KIM (Youn)	Treasurer	
Vinayak Kapoor	Treasurer	
Tiffany Auyeung	Education Director	
Momoka Honda	Education Director	
Bao Tram Nguyen	Education Director	
Aerizqa Aisyah Rakhmadani	Welfare Director	Provisionally elected unopposed
Shruthi Tharmia Prabhushankar	Graduate Director	
Bhavuk Virmani	Graduate Director	
Harshwardhan Patel	Cultural and Social Director	
Wasif Rahman Safin	Cultural and Social Director	
Winnie (Wanying) Lao	Media and Marketing Director	
Vinayak Kapoor	Media and Marketing Director	
Kayven Claus Satrio	Human Resources Director	Provisionally elected unopposed
Ella Jiayu Liang	Partnership and Sponsorship Director	Provisionally elected unopposed
Momoka Honda	Education Officer	

Nhung Hong Do	Education Officer	
Irina Gabriella Ananda	Education Officer	
Bao Tram Nguyen	Education Officer	
Yin-Xi Chloe Lin	Education Officer	
Kathryn Wang	Welfare Officer	
Isabelle Hung Ching Hii	Welfare Officer	
Norah (Zhinuo) Huang	Welfare Officer	
Jeasy Chhun	Welfare Officer	
Ynez Wu	Welfare Officer	
Cornellius Salim	Welfare Officer	
Tanay Sonthalia	Welfare Officer	
Jasmine Qawiemah Matakim Leong	Welfare Officer	
Ziyue Zhuang	Welfare Officer	
<i>No nominations received</i>	<i>Graduate Officer</i>	
Shreeyukta Adhikari	Cultural and Social Officer	
Cornellius Salim	Cultural and Social Officer	
Harshwardhan Patel	Cultural and Social Officer	
Ynez Wu	Cultural and Social Officer	
Isaac Hung Nguong Hii	Cultural and Social Officer	
Shamika Sharma	Cultural and Social Officer	
Jawzi Dastakeer Muhammed Raaid	Cultural and Social Officer	
Xin Huai Lee	Cultural and Social Officer	
Yin-Xi Chloe Lin	Cultural and Social Officer	
Ishita Sharma	Media and Marketing Officer	
Thomas Chen	Media and Marketing Officer	Withdrawn
Winnie (Wanying) Lao	Media and Marketing Officer	
Zhao He Kok	Media and Marketing Officer	
Damian Nguyen	Media and Marketing Officer	
Made Vinaya Wiharsa	Media and Marketing Officer	
Damien Wei Hao Toh	Partnership and Sponsorship Officer	Will be elected unopposed if unsuccessful for President
Isabelle Hung Ching Hii	Human Resources Officer	
Isaac Hung Nguong Hii	Human Resources Officer	
Jeasy Chhun	Human Resources Officer	
Suhas Agrawal	Human Resources Officer	
Kaelyn Miranda	Human Resources Officer	
Ella Liang	Human Resources Officer	(elected to earlier position)

A total of four nominations were rejected by the Returning Officer.

Patrick Clearwater  
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Returning Officer  
Above Quota Elections Pty Ltd



4th May 2024

## **Appendix B: Provisional declaration of results**

The following are declared provisionally elected. For multi-member positions, candidates are listed in order of election.

### **President**

Damien Wei Hao Toh

### **Vice-President (Education and Welfare)**

Yuxuan Liu (*unopposed*)

### **Vice-President (Cultural and Social)**

Korakot Saingam (Kayden)

### **Vice-President (Media and Marketing)**

Jesslyn Alexis Andriono (*unopposed*)

### **Secretary**

Qi Evelyn Wang

### **Treasurer**

Seoyoun KIM (Youn)

### **Education Director**

Tiffany Auyeung

### **Welfare Director**

Aerizqa Aisyah Rakhmadani (*unopposed*)

## **Graduate Director**

Shruthi Tharmia Prabhushankar

## **Cultural and Social Director**

Harshwardhan Patel

## **Media and Marketing Director**

Winnie (Wanying) Lao

## **Human Resources Director**

Kayven Claus Satrio (*unopposed*)

## **Partnership and Sponsorship Director**

Ella Jiayu Liang (*unopposed*)

## **Education Officer (three to elect)**

Momoka Honda

Yin-Xi Chloe Lin

Irina Gabriella Ananda

## **Welfare Officer (five to elect)**

Isabelle Hung Ching Hii

Kathryn Wang

Jeasy Chhun

Cornellius Salim

Jasmine Qawiemah Matakim Leong

## **Graduate Officer**

*No nominations received*

## **Cultural and Social Officer (five to elect)**

Xin Huai Lee

Shreeyukta Adhikari

Ynez Wu

Isaac Hung Nguong Hii

Shamika Sharma

## **Media and Marketing Officer (three to elect)**

Ishita Sharma

Zhao He Kok

Made Vinaya Wiharsa

## **Partnership and Sponsorship Officer**

*Only nomination was elected to higher position*

## **Human Resources Officer (two to elect)**

Suhas Agrawal

Kaelyn Miranda

The total number of voters was 1,316, which exceeds the minimum of 500 set out in the Regulations.

The full countsheets for all contested positions can be found at this link:

<https://www.bigpulse.com/pollresults?code=1350280yFzqFKL3sKgauLzGHd9T>

UMSU International Election Regulation 19 provides for appeals against the results of elections, which must be made by candidates within one academic day of the notice of results being published, that is, by the end of Monday 13th May 2023. Appeals should be addressed to the Electoral Tribunal and a copy sent to the Returning Officer.

Patrick Clearwater

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Returning Officer

Above Quota Elections Pty Ltd



10th May 2024