

University of Melbourne Student Union
UMSU International Annual General Election, 2026

20-22 May 2026

Report of the Returning Officer



Above Quota Elections Pty Ltd
abovequota.com.au

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Summary

Above Quota Elections (AQE) were engaged by the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU) to run the 2026 annual general election for UMSU International.

From AQE's staff, Patrick Clearwater was the Returning Officer, and Stephen Luntz and Charles Richardson were Deputy Returning Officers.

This year's elections were held over three days, Wednesday 20th to Friday 22nd May. Our appointment was also later than usual, compressing the timeframe somewhat, which is discussed further below.

The positions to be elected have changed slightly since last year, with the removal of the Graduate Director and Officer, and some changes to the number of vacancies for certain other positions. As is usual in UMSU International elections, all positions on the committee were up for election. The ultimate authority for the election remains UMSU's Electoral Tribunal.

Owing to the compressed timeframe, our recommendation (which the Tribunal accepted) was to run the election online. BigPulse were engaged as the electronic service provider.

Nominations ran from 27th April to 11th May. We received a total of 51 nominations by close of nominations, and 35 proceeded to the election (along with 13 elected unopposed).

Total turnout was 1 179. This is somewhat down on last year's (which was 1 629); the shorter polling period, later in the semester, is almost certainly the primary contributor.

Candidate conduct was generally good; albeit with a flurry of complaints towards the end of the polling period, which are discussed later in the report. The changes to the Electoral Regulations, particularly those around social media, worked well, significantly reducing the number of minor issues we needed to deal with.

Nominations

Preliminary results were posted on Friday night, and a provisional declaration was made on Sunday 24th May. This meant Monday 25th May was the day allowed for appeals; none were received.

Nominations for the election opened on 27th April, but AQE were not appointed until 6th May, and so nominations were opened by UMSU. We were able to provide some advice to UMSU outside our formal engagement, and provided a copy of the nomination form used in 2025 for use as a template.

Once we were appointed, we migrated responses from the UMSU form, and turned on the nominator/seconder system, which was not workable using the template alone without the AQE

backend. As in past years, most nominations came towards the end of the nomination period, so most were able to use the automatic system.

As has become clichéd, the “nominator/seconders must not be a candidate” rule again reared its head. We once again recommend changes to this.

We received the roll from the University in good time and were able to check all nominations before the deadline.

In total, we received 51 nominations from 41 unique students. One nomination was rejected, one was withdrawn prior to the commencement of polling, 13 were elected because the number of candidates was less than or equal to the number of vacancies, and one nomination was automatically voided because the candidate was elected to a higher position, leading to 35 candidates proceeding to the poll.

Because of the compressed timeframe, it was not possible to schedule a prospective candidates' information session, as our usual practice would be. We reviewed the election website very closely to ensure it covered everything we say during that session, but of course it's always preferable to hold a session.

Policy Speech Session

After close of nominations, we held the Policy Speech Session on 18th May. This was again quite late (only two days before polling started) but we judged it the best option in the circumstances.

All candidates for contested executive and director positions were invited to make a speech; and then all candidates for contested positions (including Officer positions) answered questions posed to them by the audience.

We recorded the session and posted it on the election website, also including it in the ballot mailout to students. We continued the experiment of the last two years' in editing the video to add title straps and remove pauses. This was more challenging this year as we had only one day between the session and polling, but we still believe it was worth it.

Despite only one officer position being contested, the Policy Speech Session started at 4.30pm and continued until just after 7pm. Many audience members (quite understandably) were unable or unwilling to attend the entire evening. This is the case even though the time limits for speaking are quite short. We think some attention should be given to considering ways the Policy Speech Session might be shortened, split up or otherwise made more accessible, while still preserving the event's energy.

Polling

Voting emails were sent to students at 9am on Wednesday 20th May. Polling was conducted through the BigPulse platform. While we can never be certain, from our discussions with students it seems that the email delivery was quick, with every student we talked to reporting receiving theirs within a few hours of 9am.

The eligibility to vote remains unchanged: all international students enrolled in a higher education award course, as well as current members of the UMSU International Committee.

A reminder email was sent on Friday of polling week. As a consequence, Wednesday and Friday were the days we took the most votes, with the latter almost matching the former. Turnout, which totalled 1 179 votes, was clearly affected by the shorter polling period, the election taking place late in semester (week 11), and the fact that so many of the officer positions were uncontested and therefore candidates for those positions did not campaign. Overall, we think if it were possible to adjust for those factors, turnout would be similar to previous years.

We had office hours each day in room 4.06 in Building 168. We advertised slightly shorter hours on the election website, but in practice were available from 8.45am–5pm.

Lanyards, which we trialled last year, have now been written into the Regulations as a requirement, and we distributed them from our office.

Results

We held a session for candidates' scrutineers on Friday evening, in Building 168. At this session we showed all results except one: that position had a complaint received within a few minutes of close of polling which we wanted to investigate.

We made the provisional declaration of results on Sunday 24 May and the final declaration (a copy of which is affixed to this report) on Monday 1 June.

The Regulations allow a period of one academic day for appeals, i.e. Monday 25th May. No appeals were received.

Complaints

The election period started well, and we received remarkably few complaints during the first two days of polling. This lull was not to last, and we received a large number of complaints throughout Friday.

While in previous election reports (both for UMSU International, and UMSU elections) we have referenced the distressing frequency of breaches of ballot secrecy by a candidate watching a voter to ensure they voted "correctly", we are alarmed that a significant fraction of similar

complaints in this election suggested the even more serious offence of taking a student's phone and voting for them, including complaints from uninvolved voters. Sometimes "uninvolved" voters are not as uninvolved as they appear, but in many reports the complainant did not identify the offending party, frustrating enforcement, but also making it very unlikely the complaints were falsified for partisan gain, so we regard them as credible.

In last year's report, we said the main breach reported and dealt with was non-campaigners re-sharing candidate material. We also said that virtually every such breach was innocent, and so we are gratified that our recommendation to address this problem has been taken. The rules now give the Returning Officer power to determine how social media may be used by non-campaigners, and we made a determination that, in summary, allowed innocent reshares but prohibited organised campaigning. This worked well, eliminating a whole class of complaints without any apparent downsides. There is still some uncertainty about how this works, particularly where candidates may have a pre-existing affinity for one another but are prohibited from campaigning together. We will tweak our determination going forward, to try to better capture these nuances.

Recommendations

We are pleased to see last year's recommendations were examined carefully and UMSU International gave serious consideration to each.

One strong recommendation we have is to appoint the Returning Officer much earlier in the process. We acknowledge this year's late appointment was due to factors beyond UMSU's control, and understand that this recommendation is broadly accepted, so do not belabour the point.

Attendance polling

The last few years we have made recommendations to consider a return to attendance polling. This year, there is a natural opportunity to experiment: the UMSU annual election in September will be by (electronic) attendance. We recommend that UMSU International carefully examine how that goes, and consider whether the same is appropriate with the UMSU International elections.

Many of the factors driving our recommendation that the September election be by attendance do not apply to UMSU International: we have not historically seen the sort of mass-ballot-secrecy violations that we do at the September elections; candidates for UMSU International find the experience much less stressful; and certain structural advantages (the two-campaigner limit and the strict rules against joint campaigning) make organised breaches harder.

Conversely, the risks around online voting still apply to UMSU International. In some ways they are more acute: because many international students are from non-democratic countries, or countries with very different democratic culture from Australia, they are in a worse position than the student body as a whole to acculturate the norms we regard as important in democracy: fair play, a free opportunity to vote, secrecy of the ballot, impartial election authorities, and so forth. Much can be said about the relative merits of these and other governance systems, and the extent to which Australian elections actually embody those values, but we regard part of our role as educational: exhibiting the merits, and shortcomings, of a professionally-run democratic election. Online polling loses some of this.

Finally, although this election started smoothly, towards the end there was a worrying recurrence of the ballot secrecy violations, campaigner coercion of voters, and late-night campaigning activities that caused so much difficulty last September. Once again, complaints about illegal campaigning were accompanied by photos and videos with contested interpretations, and there was much we found suspicious.

For this reason we recommend the return, in September, to attendance polling be closely watched by UMSU International.

Streamline the nomination/seconder process

This recommendation substantially restates one made last year under the same title.

Given the continuing appetite for the nominator/seconder process, we suggest it be amended so the Returning Officer can permit substitution of an alternative nominator/seconder for a short period after the close of nominations.

Clarify the rules on “mailing lists and public online forums”

The Electoral Regulations state:

12.7 [...] (d) *The use of mailing lists and public online forums by any candidate(s) and/or representative(s) of the candidate(s), and/or any club(s)/society(ies)/entity(ies) for campaign purposes is not permitted.*

Mailing lists in the classic sense are now quite rare (although use of University email lists has been a problem in the past), and it's not clear to us what the regulations are intending to capture with “public online forum”.

What is common (and generated complaints in both this and past UMSU International elections) is the use of Discord, WhatsApp group chats, and similar services. In keeping with our understanding of the regulation's intent, we have done our best to regulate this. Broadly, our approach has been:

- Where a group is obtained from an external organisation for a non-election purpose, it is a mailing list and use for election purposes is prohibited. Common examples include club groups, groups organised by accommodation providers, and the Discord server for first-years.
- Where a group is just a small collection of friends, we regard this as a private conversation beyond the publicity rules. Common examples include the “chores chat” for sharehouses and friendship group chats with five or six people.
- Where a group doesn’t fit neatly into these categories, we have tentatively allowed campaigning, but on the basis that (a) campaigners have permission from the group’s owner/moderator, and (b) the group allow any member (who is a candidate or their campaigner) to post similar messages on equal footing.

This is not the only possible approach to this problem, simply the one we have fashioned out of some years’ experience, and the existing regulations. There is much to criticise about it. We recommend UMSU International consider the matter, and rewrite Electoral Regulation 12.7(d) accordingly.

Smaller or technical matters

There are a few smaller matters, and some technical issues, we identify in the Regulations.

- EReg 8 sets a deadline of 5pm for nominations “seven (7) full academic days” before polling. In interest of maximising the nomination period, this was stretched slightly this year, extending nominations to 9am on the day that was very clearly seven academic days before the first day of polling. However, it reveals an ambiguity in drafting: one view is that, being seven academic days before polling, should not nominations have closed at 5pm on that day? But if that view is accepted, what work does the word “full” do in the regulation? We recommend this rule be redrafted so it is clear what it means.
- EReg 9.4 limits the number of nominations per student to two. Generally, we regard a limit as desirable. This year, however, some officer positions went unfilled while candidates fought out executive and, to a lesser extent, director positions. We suggest UMSU International consider either raising the limit to three, or allowing a nomination for an officer position in addition to two other nominations.
- EReg 12.5 has a close-bracket “)” at the end, which appears to be a typo.
- The publicity regulations in EReg 12.7 have lost the requirement that election material carry the words “Published by [name] ([student number]). Registered with the returning officer”. We recommend that the requirement is restored.

- EReg 17.3 makes reference to the “UMSU International Secretary” while the Umsu International Regulations refer to the “UMSU International General Secretary”. We recommend one be amended to be consistent with the other.
- In some places the electoral regulations use a numeric and alphabetic doublet [EReg 9.2, “Only one (1) position”], in others alphabetic only [EReg 10.1, “... at least forty-eight hours...”], in yet others numeric only (EReg 14.3, “... limited to 250 words...”). The Returning Officer has a certain fondness for spelling out “one” to “ten” (despite modern Australian practice ending at “nine”, with “10” usually as numerals¹), but acknowledges that in legal contexts, numerals for numbers other than “zero” and “one” are preferred^{2, 3}. The doublet is now discouraged⁴, but even if this recommendation for its abolition is not taken, we suggest at least consistency is desirable.

Declaration

I declare that the 2026 Umsu 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

The compressed timeframe made this election more challenging than usual logistically, and we are especially grateful to the staff within Umsu who opened nominations in advance of our appointment and were helpful in handing things over once we had been appointed.

Special thanks also to:

- Umsu and Umsu International staff, particularly Mary Chan, Fiona Sanders, Lachie James, Hana Arai and the others within the Student Representation Department
- The Umsu communications team for assistance with advertising and promotion

1 “numbers, measurements” in *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, “The ABC Style Guide”, <<https://www.abc.net.au/about/abc-style-guide>> (accessed 22 May 2026)

2 “Choosing numerals or words” in *Australian Government*, “Style manual”, <<https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/grammar-punctuation-and-conventions/numbers-and-measurements/choosing-numerals-or-words>> (accessed 22 May 2026)

3 “Part 5—Numbers, percentages and fractions” in Quiggin, Peter, “Drafting Direction 2.1”, Office of Parliamentary Counsel (2016)

4 s 161, *Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions*, “CDPP Legal Writing Style Guide” (2024)

- Katherine and the staff at BigPulse
- The University of Melbourne and the University Secretary and her staff; and a particular thanks to the ever-suffering student enrolments team for dealing with our enquiries
- The candidates, campaigners and voters for their participation

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

Appendices

Appendix A: Provisional list of nominations received

This document lists nominations accepted nominations for the 2026 Umsu International election.

A random draw for order was held Wednesday 13 May. This list is in the order candidates will appear on the ballot.

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
Bhavya Middha	President	
Xing Ying Denise Lim	President	
Jaahnvi Chandra	President	Withdrawn
Tanya Parashar	Vice-President (Education and Welfare)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Mishti Mittal	Vice-President (Cultural and Social)	
Shantell Dias	Vice-President (Cultural and Social)	
Mohit Nanda	Vice-President (Media and Marketing)	
Terry Dinh	Vice-President (Media and Marketing)	
Anushka Dubey	Vice-President (Media and Marketing)	
Phoebe Chan	Vice-President (Media and Marketing)	
Shivansh Sanghi	Secretary	
Sheela Lim Jia Ni	Secretary	
Parth Kamleshbhai Chandrani	Secretary	
Yurou (Rhea) Fan	Secretary	
Hari Dutt Vyas	Treasurer	
Whitney Yeung	Treasurer	

Saumyaa Sarup	Treasurer	
Gerelmaa-Od	Treasurer	Nomination rejected
Raiesa Khutel	Education Director	
Mishka Mishka	Education Director	
Cody Luo	Welfare Director	Provisionally elected unopposed
Saharsh Jain	Cultural and Social Director	
Sai Wing Ryan Siu	Cultural and Social Director	
Bhavy Batra	Cultural and Social Director	
Jhanvi Raghav	Media and Marketing Director	Provisionally elected unopposed
Lynn Ho	Human Resources Director	
Mohit Nanda	Human Resources Director	
Haylyn Yu Ting Hoo	Human Resources Director	
Terry Dinh	Partnership and Sponsorship Director	
Yanyan Zhang	Partnership and Sponsorship Director	
Aarush Yadav	Partnership and Sponsorship Director	
Aakanksha Bagal	Partnership and Sponsorship Director	
Kaavya Kalra	Education Officer (three positions to elect)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Anushka Dubey	Welfare Officer (five positions to elect)	Will be elected unopposed if not successful for Vice-President (Media and Marketing)
Cody Luo	Welfare Officer (five positions to elect)	Elected to earlier position
Declan Benedictus Lee	Welfare Officer (five positions to elect)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Eric Lee	Welfare Officer (five positions to elect)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Parth Kamleshbhai Chandrani	Welfare Officer (five positions to elect)	Will be elected unopposed if not successful for Secretary
Yihan Li	Welfare Officer (five positions to elect)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Hari Dutt Vyas	Cultural and Social Officer (five positions to elect)	Will be elected unopposed if not successful for Treasurer
Jiya Pareek	Cultural and Social Officer (five positions to elect)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Jonathan Song	Cultural and Social Officer	Provisionally elected

	(five positions to elect)	unopposed
Lisa Jia	Cultural and Social Officer (five positions to elect)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Paridhi Chhajed	Cultural and Social Officer (five positions to elect)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Kyra Saneja	Media and Marketing Officer (three positions to elect)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Lynn Ho	Media and Marketing Officer (three positions to elect)	Will be elected unopposed if not successful for Human Resources Director
Simar Kohli	Media and Marketing Officer (three positions to elect)	Provisionally elected unopposed
Vardaan Chanana	Partnership and Sponsorship Officer	
Aakanksha Bagal	Partnership and Sponsorship Officer	
Yanyan Zhang	Partnership and Sponsorship Officer	
Jiya Pareek	Human Resources Officer- (two positions to elect)	Already elected

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 Returning Officer
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18 May 2026

Appendix B: Declaration of results

The following are declared elected.

President

Bhavya Middha

Vice-President (Education and Welfare)

Tanya Parashar (*elected unopposed*)

Vice-President (Cultural and Social)

Mishti Mittal

Vice-President (Media and Marketing)

Phoebe Chan

General Secretary

Yurou (Rhea) Fan

Treasurer

Saumyaa Sarup

Education Director

Raiesa Khutel

Welfare Director

Cody Luo (*elected unopposed*)

Cultural and Social Director

Sai Wing Ryan Siu

Media and Marketing Director

Jhanvi Raghav (*elected unopposed*)

Human Resources Director

Haylyn Yu Ting Hoo

Partnership and Sponsorship Director

Aarush Yadav

Education Officer (three to elect)

Kaavya Kalra

(*two vacancies remain*)

Welfare Officer (five to elect)

Anushka Dubey (*elected unopposed*)

Declan Benedictus Lee (*elected unopposed*)

Eric Lee (*elected unopposed*)

Parth Kamleshbhai Chandrani (*elected unopposed*)

Yihan Li (*elected unopposed*)

Cultural and Social Officer (five to elect)

Hari Dutt Vyas (*elected unopposed*)

Jiya Pareek (*elected unopposed*)

Jonathan Song (*elected unopposed*)

Lisa Jia (*elected unopposed*)

Paridhi Chhajed (*elected unopposed*)

Media and Marketing Officer (three to elect)

Kyra Saneja (*elected unopposed*)

Simar Kohli (*elected unopposed*)

Lynn Ho (*elected unopposed*)

Partnership and Sponsorship Officer

Vardaan Chanana

Human Resources Officer (two to elect)

No nominations

The total number of voters was 1 179, which exceeds the minimum of 500 set out in the Regulations. Note that voters are not obliged to vote for every position, so vote totals differ on a per-position basis.

The full countsheets for contested positions can be found here:

<https://www.bigpulse.com/pollresults?code=1356588z7R3u3pmgtD6R2FCLdt4>

The period for appeals ended on Monday 25th May 2026. No appeals were received.

Patrick Clearwater

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Returning Officer

Above Quota Elections Pty Ltd



1 June 2026

Appendix C: Determinations of the Returning Officer

Determination (I) of the Returning Officer

1. **Electoral Regulation 12.7(d)** — This Regulation prohibits (among other things) use of mailing lists for campaign purposes. This prohibition includes email lists, including ones

compiled from the University student directory. While it is permissible (subject to other Electoral Regulations) to email friends to campaign to them individually, we regard it as a breach of this rule if a mailing list is used, even if emails are sent manually one-by-one.

2. **Deadline for candidate statements and photographs** — I set a deadline of 8pm Monday 11 May for candidate statements and photographs.
3. **Nominator and seconder** — The Electoral Regulations are clear that nomination and seconding are required before a candidacy is accepted. This year, we have a process where each candidate must have their nominator and seconder confirm, via email, that they performed the nomination/secondering. I rule:
 - a. Those confirmations must be received by 8pm Monday 11 May.
 - b. While a candidate can change nominator/seconder up to the nomination deadline (9am Monday 11 May), this is **not possible** after that deadline. That is, the grace period is only for the Returning Officer to be satisfied with the nomination/secondering process, not an extension of time to find an eligible nominator/seconder.
4. **Campaigning in academic spaces** — Campaigning during active teaching activities, including tutorials, lectures, workshops, colloquia, laboratories, classes, practicals and seminars is prohibited. Short campaign announcements (“lecture bashes”) at the beginning or end of an activity are permitted only with written permission from the teacher, such permission which must extend to all candidates on a fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory basis, and a copy of which must be provided to the Returning Officer.
5. **Registration of material** — Material registration is by email to the Returning Officer (contact details on election website). Material will be accepted for registration only if it carries the words “Published by *[name of candidate/campaigner who takes responsibility for the material]* (*[student number]*)”. We will review submissions as quickly as practical; material may be shared prior to our review, at candidates’ own risk, but we encourage controversial or widely-disseminated material to be registered well in advance.
6. **Social media** — Previously, the Electoral Regulations prohibited (re-)sharing campaign material on social media other than by candidates and registered campaigners. Electoral Regulation 12.5 changes this. Going forward:
 - a. Students, who are not candidates/registered campaigners, may reshare social media in the platform’s usual way, as long as no substantial material is added with the reshare, such resharing is not part of an organised course of conduct, and is not solicited by the candidate or their campaigners.

- b. As a general guide, anyone repeatedly resharing material, altering material, or targeting material at specific groups or audiences will be viewed as high-risk of breaching this rule.
 - c. All material on social media must be prepared in a way that, when reshared, the name and student number of the publisher remains on or clearly linked with the material.
7. All times in this determination are Melbourne time.

Patrick Clearwater
UMSU International Returning Officer
Above Quota Elections Pty Ltd

10 May 2026

