

Arrangements for Senate Elections: Publication of Voting Data

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to support further consideration by Senate of the arrangements for publishing voting data.

Following a Freedom of Information request for the release of election data, AGC and Senate discussed whether the results of the 2017 election should be made public. Those nominating themselves for election to Senate would need to agree to data on the outcome of the election being published. The current position is that anonymised data relating to the outcome of Senate elections is released to candidates and to Senate; and that candidates are provided with data relating to the number of votes cast in their favour on request.

Although there was a strong case for transparency in the conduct of all elections there was some opposition to changing the current position. There was concern that publication may deter some potential candidates from standing, and in particular, it was suggested that full publication of the results might result in fewer women nominating themselves for election, resulting in a less diverse membership of Senate.

On balance, Senate agreed that it would be helpful to retain the current arrangements for the next round of Senate elections but to consider the issue afresh before the next round of elections.

AGC revisited the debate at their February meeting and noted that there was no ideal solution, however, they agreed that it should be raised again at Senate prior to the next round of elections. Senate is therefore asked to revisit the arrangements for publishing voting data and to consider whether there is a case for change for the 2018 election round.

It is anticipated that the next round of Senate elections will take place in May/June 2018. Nominations for election to Senate will be sought following the 16th May meeting of Senate. The paper initially considered by Senate in May 2017 is included at Annex A for information and the corresponding minute extract is included at Annex B.

Two actions required.

Recommended action

Senate is asked:

- (i) to revisit the arrangements for publishing voting data
- (ii) to agree a way forward for the 2018 election round

Publication: Open

Future Senate Elections

Summary

Senate is asked to consider arrangements for future Senate elections.

Improvements to the election process were identified in discussion with colleagues following the 2016 election and were recently discussed and endorsed by AGC at their April meeting. The proposals are as follows:

- The call for nominations period should be at least 2 weeks.
- The voting period should be at least 2 weeks.
- The election should take place in the Summer Term in advance of the last Senate meeting of the academic year.
- The contact details of the College Secretary and the SES should be circulated to academic staff so they may make enquiries about the Senator role before putting themselves forward.

In addition to the above, AGC considered the use of election data following election results. By way of background information, a Freedom of Information (FOI) request was received requesting publication of the full 2016 Senate election results. City's response was that voting figures could be provided, but that the data would be anonymised, on the basis that the information requested was 'personal data' under the terms of the Data Protection Act and that it would not be 'fair' to release it under the terms of Section 40 of that Act. No indication was given when seeking nomination for Senate elections that the detailed results would be published. Candidates had no 'reasonable expectation' that their personal data would be released as nominees were unaware of how the election data relating to them would be used.

Permission to release the data was sought following the request with a written note sent to all nominees. In addition, all nominees were given the opportunity to learn their own results under the Subject Access Request provisions of the Data Protection Act. However, one nominee objected to the release of their data and therefore the full results were not released.

AGC agreed that the results of future elections should be released on request. AGC did not wish to deter potential candidates from standing and therefore also recommended that the results should not be widely publicised. However, it is acknowledged that once results are in the public domain the information may be distributed more extensively. All nominees would be made aware that data relating to the election results may be released following the election.

Senate is asked to consider the proposed arrangements.

One action required.

Recommended Action

Senate is asked to **consider** the proposed arrangements for future Senate elections.

MINUTE EXTRACT
SENATE
MEETING 279 HELD ON 17th MAY 2017
APPROVED MINUTES

19. Future Senate Elections

Senate **considered** the proposals for the conduct of future Senate elections. The proposals reflected feedback on the timing of the elections received following the 2016 election. The College Secretary noted that he was liaising with the SES in relation to whose contact details to provide to prospective nominees. In addition, the College Secretary reported that, following a Freedom of Information request for the release of election data, Senate was being asked to discuss whether those nominating themselves for election to Senate should agree to data on the outcome of the election being published. AGC had considered the issue at their April meeting and the recommendation in the paper reflected the conclusions of AGC. In discussion the following points were made:

- The current position was that anonymised data relating to the outcome of Senate elections would be released to candidates and to Senate; and that candidates would be provided with data relating the number of votes cast in their favour on request.
- Publishing the outcome of the election in full might deter some potential candidates from standing, if they feared that they would receive a very small number of votes and they would find this embarrassing. In particular, it was suggested that full publication of the results might result in fewer women nominating themselves for election, resulting in a less diverse membership of Senate.
- Equally, publishing the outcome in full might encourage others to stand as they would have clearer knowledge how many votes were needed to be elected. There was also a strong case for transparency in the conduct of all elections.
- The SU published their election results in full each year. They endeavoured to make candidates from underrepresented groups feel empowered to stand.
- Election to Senate should be considered more as a voluntary service rather than as a traditional election to a 'position of power'. It would also be unfortunate if releasing the outcome of election results in full encouraged electioneering and raised questions as to whether, for example, it was more difficult for candidates from smaller Schools at City to achieve election to Senate.
- On balance, Senate agreed that it would be helpful to retain the proposed arrangements for the next round of Senate elections but to consider the issue afresh before the next round of elections. **[Action]**