

2242 Dismantling Endorsement Culture

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Union Notes:

1. The act of endorsement is utilised in order to give a specific electoral candidate an advantage in an election, through influencing voters' decisions via the application of personal testimony.
2. Bye law 5.9 states that 'all elections taking place at the Union of UEA Students shall be: fair and open, democratic, accessible and transparent.'¹
3. Bye Law 8.1 states 'the Union is committed to treating everyone equally and with respect.'²
4. Bye law 8.2.1 states that UUEAS equal opportunities regulations exist to 'ensure that this Union is proactive in promoting equality of Opportunity.'³

Union Believes:

1. Equal opportunity with regards to elections is a value that UUEAS should strive to protect and defend.
2. The endorsing of candidates is not problematic when a regular student engages in this sort of action. However, the aforementioned endorsing becomes problematic when an elected Officer of UUEAS engages in such behaviour, due to the influence and authority they extrude within the SU. There is currently a culture of individual candidates being endorsed by UUEAS Officers with the intention of giving them an advantage within an election. This endorsement culture has unfortunately become a standard and expected part of how the election process operates within UUEAS.
3. Under the current electoral system, leadership election candidates who work closely with elected Union Officers (i.e. who are inside the SU 'bubble') have a significant advantage over their peers in the leadership election, due to a greater resource of manifesto realisation, manifesto construction, campaigning guidance and campaigning assistance being available to them. This makes the playing field unequal throughout the election process.
4. Elected Union Officers, especially FTOs, possess a significant influence within the membership. Thus the endorsement of a specific candidate carries weight, and can influence the way that individual students vote in real terms.

¹https://ueanorwich.sharepoint.com/sites/ueeas_campaignsandpolicy/Shared%20Documents/TONY%20KEEP%202016/Governance/Live%20Articles%20and%20Constitution/1%20Live%20BLs%20December%2017/A2%20Bye%20Laws%20Staff%20Protocol%2016%2011%2017.pdf?srid=16534f9e-30aa-5000-7b1e-1a4f20710629 (accessed 01/03/2018)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

5. This becomes even more apparent when individual candidate receive endorsements from elected officers of the National Union of Students.
6. Such endorsements as outlined above give the candidates who receive them an unfair advantage over their peers in the election.
7. The act of elected Union Officers openly showing preference to a specific candidates via endorsement, results in the election becoming increasingly difficult for candidates running against said endorsed candidate as equality of treatment and equality of opportunity has been removed.
8. Thus, such action violates the spirit and intention of by-laws 5.9, 8.1 and 8.2.1.

Union Resolves:

1. Update the online guide to include direction to both Officers and electoral candidates. In such a guide must be the following principles:

In order to ensure adherence to the principles outlined in by-law 5.9:

- No elected Officer of the Union of UEA Students (UUEAS) may endorse a specific candidate in any union election in any verbal or written fashion.
- Elected Officers remain permitted to encourage other students to run in the leadership elections.
- No electoral candidate may accept and subsequently publish an endorsement by an individual who is not a member of UUEAS.
- No elected Union Officer may offer a specific electoral candidate advice on an individual level on any matters regarding manifesto realisation or manifesto construction, which goes beyond providing general, universal guidance.

2. Launch an investigation, using an Ad-hoc Student Officer Committee (SOC), into the effect endorsement culture has on elections within UUEAS, and into how accessible the UUEAS leadership elections are for candidates, taking into account the viewpoints, opinions and testimonies of both previous candidates, current officers and a wide sample of the student electorate. Subsequently, the Ad-Hoc SOC will be mandated to present recommendations for further improvement of the election procedure to Union Council