



Riki Scanlan | *2022 Electoral Officer*
Students' Representative Council, University of Sydney
Level 1, Wentworth Bldg. University of Sydney NSW 2006
elections@src.usyd.edu.au | (02) 9660 5222
srcusyd.net.au/elections

2022 SRC Electoral Officer's Report

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Acknowledgement

This report was prepared on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. The elections themselves were primarily conducted on the land of the same, although the candidates and voters ranged across far wider lands. Sovereignty was never ceded, and the history of Aboriginal dispossession by imperial and domestic interests alike bears down strongly upon the present.

1. Introduction

This Report details the 2022 Annual Elections of the SRC.

Overall, I am pleased with the performance of candidates and campaigners across the elections. Generally, everyone acquitted themselves well. Particular praise must go to the campaign managers of the various campaigns, who took on the burdensome duty of liaising with me throughout the elections. Congratulations, of course, should also be directed to the successful candidates who were elected in their respective elections.

Returning to an in-person election for the first time since 2019 was a herculean task. The efficacy of our election administration depends on a pool of labour that returns from year-to-year. My primary focus was therefore on ensuring that there was an adequate skill base to run the booths and the count. In this regard, particular thanks are owed to Tara Oswald, Julie Hoang, Cameron Hawkins, Nic Avery and Evan Gray as key booth captains. Morgan Westley served as Deputy EO – with the great shoes of Cameron Caccamo to fill – and performed ably and diligently in that capacity.

Some quarters might be disappointed with the turnout, which is markedly lower than preceding online elections and the last in-person elections. A more detailed explanation is available later in this Report, but it's worth noting that many students continued to study remotely throughout 2022. With the TEQSA orders requiring universities to return to onshore in-person education from July 2023, there will be a greater density of students on campus. I anticipate a progressive return to pre-pandemic figures over the following years as student awareness of the SRC increases, though we will likely see a considerable bump in turnout in this year's elections.

The primary focus that I took for this report was on the election financials, which you can find a detailed breakdown and historical analysis in Appendix B. In short, election costs have been steadily growing across the past half-decade – barring the online interregnum of 2020–2021. Election spending is primarily wages for staff. Growth in the wages bill is set by the growing student population and a shift in booth staffing in 2018 towards a larger number of staff to facilitate higher voter turnouts. This was successful in achieving the record high turnouts in 2018 and 2019.

Meanwhile, budgets requested from SSAF negotiations have stayed more or less static at \$75,000. In this Report I propose an increase in SSAF funding for elections to \$88,250, which will defray the costs imposed by ongoing inflationary pressures on wages. (The SRC wage-rates are set in line with CPI.) A budget breakdown is available in Appendix B as well.

The remainder of this Introduction lists and explains the various recommendations that I put forward for the 2022 Council to consider.

Number of Representatives on Council

Recommendation: The SRC should amend the Constitution (3(a)) to decrease the number of Representatives. At present, the number of Representatives is set at one per thousand students, or part thereof. In 2022, we elected 41 Councillors, which is a record high. Instead, it should be fixed at a definite quantity – the old standard of 33 is a workable option.

This is undesirable. To get elected, you need a quota equal to about 1-in-42 votes – or 2.4% of the vote. In a large electorate (i.e. millions of voters), there is not too great a concern with a large representative body, because even a few percent is a substantial challenge. Given the electoral conditions of the SRC – a small electorate with a large number of candidates – the effect of this low quota is rather extreme. Towards the back-end of the election, getting elected is essentially a game of accruing tiny quantities of distributed votes – and the occasional whopper of a whole unfiltered full-value vote. At the third-last count, for example, just 5.8 votes separated the bottom ten candidates. Of these, the bottom six were separated by just 2.2 votes.

On the flip side, the increasing number of seats has led to an increasing number of overquota elected candidates, whose votes distribute through an increasing number of subsequently elected candidates. The effect of this is that some votes distribute at exceptionally marginal values. A whole set of votes, for example, elected seven different people, and was valued at a grand total of:

0.00000103592959616696

Yes, that's just a little more than a millionth of a vote. But we are obliged to distribute it in order to enable scrutineers to be satisfied that there is no fraudulent accounting of votes.

Setting Councillors equal to 33 means that you need 3.33% of the vote to be elected, or about 120 votes in a 4000 vote election. Requiring candidates to receive at least the support of 100 people (whether directly or after preferences) is a reasonable threshold test for representation in the SRC. In practice, of course, given the exhaustion rate of votes, the underquota election threshold would be about half to two-thirds that figure.

After a certain point, the value of an extra seat on Council grants diminishing returns in terms of electoral proportionality. The SRC is well beyond that point at present.

Ballot Paper Size

Recommendation: The SRC should direct the Standing Legal Committee to convene an open workshop to investigate a consensus approach for decreasing the ballot paper size, with the aims of making the elections more intelligible for voters, simpler for campaigners, and cheaper to run.

The SRC Council ballot paper (whether online or electronic) is unusually large and complex, even for other Australian student unions. While the number of candidates declined this year, it still figures in at five times more than comparable student unions. There are several reasons for this difference. First, the SRC does not have direct election for Office-Bearers (except President). The greater emphasis on these campaigns in other student unions means that the general representative elections are much simpler. Much more attention goes into the politics of contesting the Education Officer position, for example, than into a brand-level differentiation between different campaigns. Second, the number of Representatives (currently 41) is unusually large and, thus, encourages larger numbers of candidates.

Third, and most significantly, there is a long-standing customary strategy of running brands that contain many tickets, each with many candidates. Most tickets only elect one candidate, and some of these never break quota. Underpinning this ‘many tickets strategy’ is a vague analysis that this is a smart electoral strategy. Running many tickets is held to be good because you get to elect multiple candidates ‘under quota.’ It seems that you get to elect more candidates for fewer votes!

But this isn’t the full story. Empirically, some campaigns buck the trend: this year Left Action achieved six quotas on one ticket. Fundamentally, the many tickets strategy gets everything backwards: we run many tickets because under-quota elections are easier. The truth is opposite. The many tickets strategy does not *take advantage* of under-quota elections. It *causes* them to happen in the first place – and, even worse, it makes them *harder to achieve*!

It’s a wild situation when a dominant strategy makes things *harder for everyone* despite apparently making things easier for you!

Let’s see how the strategy is meant to work. The idea is that, with many tickets, you accomplish two things. First, you suck up more space on the ballot paper than other campaigns, meaning you might collect more random preferences or even primaries. (Of course, your success here is diminished if other campaigns do the same thing.) Second, you create an interlocking web of preferences that can flow within your brand, keeping as many of your candidates barely afloat as possible so that they survive to the end of the count and get elected under-quota.

But why does anyone get elected under-quota? Because many votes *exhaust* during the count. When a vote reaches the end of its preference order, it *exhausts* and is no longer in the pool of available votes. More and more votes exhaust as the count proceeds. This means it is impossible for everyone to achieve quota.

It’s fairly easy to see that the number of exhausted votes corresponds to the size of the ballot paper. For small ballot papers, voters will often vote for many if not all candidates. For large ballot papers, voters will be intimidated and overwhelmed and vote for a small fraction of the ballot paper – perhaps even fewer absolute numbers of candidates than they would have if the ballot paper was smaller! If you only preference three or four tickets, it is common that your vote will never reach anyone except for your primary preference.

In turn, this means that the apparent ease of electing candidates under quota is an illusion. Candidates at the margin – the twenty or thirty range – stand a chance of getting elected only if they receive more preferences than others in the same range. Let’s say they need around thirty additional votes to survive to the end of the election and get elected underquota. But, as we’ve seen, some large proportion of all such votes are exhausting. But you can’t know which ones will exhaust or which ones are stuck on candidates above you. That means you actually need twice as many voters to preference you *just to get you over the line*.

But this is exceptionally unreliable and finicky to achieve. Some art and skill of preference whispering can help you do modestly better than average, but these skills are hard to develop or retain and, frankly, the time and effort spent on it would be better spent elsewhere.

It is important to note, however, that this commentary does not invalidate the many-tickets approach. Rather, the many-tickets approach is like a self-fulfilling prophecy. It becomes necessary exactly because it is employed by everyone else.

The overall result is a strategic equilibrium where running many tickets is believed to be necessary to diffuse the many tickets of your opponent. It creates a situation where everyone is worse-off than they

would be otherwise, despite abandoning the strategy likely not being a disadvantage. Nevertheless, the risk of the unknown will probably mean that existing campaigns will not want to break from tradition, and a coordinated agreement amongst campaigns is probably unstable in the absence of electoral reforms.

We've seen that the many tickets strategy *causes* the size of the ballot paper, and we've seen why it's not quite as good as it claims to be. But what is to be done? Reducing the number of Representatives may have a positive effect here, but it is hard to say how large it would be.

One minor recommendation included in this Report is to alter the budgetary incentives around the number of candidates per ticket (see Appendix D). At present, expenditure limits is tied to the number of candidates per ticket: \$100 per person up to \$400. This Report proposes to simply set the budget limit per ticket at \$400, regardless of number of candidates, which will relieve administrative pressure on campaign managers and remove the incentive to add extra candidates simply to ensure your budget is maximised. While this doesn't directly target the number of tickets, the number of candidates is an associated issue with the ballot paper size and complexity.

2. Results of the 2022 SRC Annual Elections

President

There was a single nominee for President: Lia Perkins, who was declared elected.

Editors of Honi Soit

There was a single valid nominee for Honi Soit: Shake for Honi, who was declared elected. One other nominee was invalid, and another nominee withdrew before the ballots were finalised.

Delegates to NUS

A total of 1709 valid ballots were received for the election of seven (7) Delegates to the National Union of Students, with the results as follows:

Order of Election	Ticket Name	Candidate Name	Quota Elected At
1	Left Action for NUS	Maddie Clark	213.675000
2	Switch for NUS	Jasmine Donnelly	213.675000
3	Grassroots for NUS	Deaglan Godwin	213.675000
4	Left Action for NUS	Simon Upitis	213.370882
5	Amplify for NUS	Henri Collyer	178.448929
6	Lift for NUS	Aileen Tan	157.945197
7	Students FIRST	Keiron Mac Lee	157.945197

Representatives to Council

A total of 1756 valid ballots were received for the election of forty-one (41) Representatives of the 95th SRC, with the results as below. Quota was 42.

Elected at Count...	Ticket Name	Candidate Name	Votes at election (before distribution)
Primary	Left Action 4 Climate Justice	Simon Upitis	213.00
Primary	Left Action Against Racism	Jasmine Al-Rawi	114.00
Primary	Student Left Alliance	Angus Dermody	106.00
Primary	LIFT for ENVIRONMENT	Thomas Thorpe	71.00
Primary	Left Action 4 Staff Strikes	Deaglan Godwin	68.00
Primary	Engineers for SRC	Emily Mackay	64.00
Primary	Penta for Uni Life	Bowen Gao	51.00
Primary	SWITCH FOR SRC	Lauren Lancaster	45.00
Primary	Artistry for SRC	Alexander Poirier	43.00
Primary	Penta for Network	Lily Wei	42.00
Count 10	Left Action 4 Climate Justice	Yasmine Johnson	171.20
Count 10	Left Action Against Racism	Owen Marsden-Readford	70.11
Count 10	Student Left Alliance	James Sheriff	63.79
Count 13	Left Action 4 Climate Justice	Maddie Clark	128.44
Count 14	Left Action 4 Climate Justice	Julius Whitforth	87.44
Count 15	Left Action 4 Climate Justice	Akee Elliott	44.92
Count 60	SWITCH FOR EQUITY	Eliza Genevieve Crossley	42.29
Count 63	GRASSROOTS FOR SRC	Lia Perkins	42.23
Count 70	Grassroots for Climate Action	Tiger Perkins	43.05
Count 73	SWITCH AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA	Jordan Anderson	42.11
Count 75	GYMBROS for SRC	Satvik Sharma	42.53
Count 75	GRASSROOTS AGAINST CUTS	Harrison Brennan	42.16
Count 80	Amplify for STEM	Jack Scanlan	42.82

Count 87	GRASSROOTS FOR FEMINISM	Zoe Coles	42.46
Count 89	Grassroots for Free Education	Ishbel Dunsmore	41.44
Count 89	Amplify for Campus	Jasmine Donnelly	41.22
Count 89	Your Mom for SRC	Belinda Thomas	41.15
Count 89	Independents for Change	Michael Grenier	41.04
Count 89	STAND UP FOR STUDENT WELFARE	Daniel O'Shea	38.45
Count 89	Colleges for SRC	Bryson Constable	38.18
Count 89	Left Action Against Racism	Peter Gu	37.93
Count 89	LIFT for WOMEN	Qiana Harvey	35.42
Count 89	Student Left Alliance	Honey Christensen	35.25
Count 89	Engineers for Mental Health	Victor Zhang	34.23
Count 89	GRASSROOTS FOR DECOLONISATION	Rand Khatib	34.13
Count 89	LIFT for ENVIRONMENT	Cooper Gannon	33.98
Count 89	Engineers for SRC	Matylda Hayne	31.70
Count 89	Left Action 4 Staff Strikes	Ella Haid	31.24
Count 89	Penta of Mingle	Clare Liu	30.36
Count 89	Amplify for Student Welfare	Annabelle Jones	30.34
Count 89	I N T E R P O L for STEM	Emma Garrett	30.12

Representatives-Elect

The following students were declared elected to these Office Bearer roles at the meeting of the Representatives Elect on October 20th:

Position		
Vice President (1)	Daniel Bowron / Rose Donnelly	n/a
General Secretaries (1)	Tiger Perkins / Jasmine Donnelly	n/a
General Executive (5)	Michael Grenier	Eliza Genevieve Crossley
	Harrison Brennan	Emily Mackay
	Daniel O'Shea	n/a
Education Officer (2)	Ishbel Dunsmore	Yasmine Johnson
Women's Officer (2)	Alev Saracoglu	Iggy Boyde
Welfare Officer (4)	Eleanore Douglas	Harrison Brennan
	Ella Haid	Felix Tonkin
Ethno Cultural Officer (4)	Rand Khatib	<i>[vacant]</i>
	<i>[vacant]</i>	<i>[vacant]</i>
Indigenous Students' Officer (4)	<i>[vacant]</i>	<i>[vacant]</i>
	<i>[vacant]</i>	<i>[vacant]</i>
International Students' Officer (4)	Ashrika Paruthi	Kejun (Clare) Liu
	Lily Wei	Yuchen Li
Environment Officer (4)	Satvik Sharma	Maddie Clark
	Rory Larkins	Simon Upitis
Global Solidarity Officer (4)	Satvik Sharma / Cooper Gannon*	Jasmine Al-Rawi

Global Solidarity Officer (cont.)	Deaglan Godwin	Skye Danner
Inter-campus Officer (4)	Alexander Poirier	Ting Hou
	Lydia Elias	Wenqing (Theresa) Xiao
Sexual Harrasment Officer (4)	Eliza Genevieve Crossley	Grace Porter
	Alana Ramshaw	Zoe Coles
Disabilities Officer (4)	Khahn Tran	[vacant]
	Jack Scanlan	[vacant]
Queer Officer (4)	Yasmin Andrews	[vacant]
	Ella Pash	[vacant]
Mature Age Students Officer (4)	[vacant]	[vacant]
	[vacant]	[vacant]
Interfaith Officer (4)	Joshua Norena	Sargun Saluja
	Siwan Xu	Thomas Thorpe
Social Justice Officer (4)	Eddie Stephenson	Julius Whitforth
	Kiera Garland	Jordan Anderson
Refugee Rights Officer (4)	Akee Elliott	Lydia Elias
	Annabel Pettit	Amelie Roediger
Student Accomodation Officer (4)	Alana Ramshaw	Ishbel Dunsmore
	Jordan Anderson	Michelle Ung
Chair of Standing Legal Committee (1)	Grace Wallman	n/a

Member of Intercampus Committee (2)	Belinda Thomas	Alexander Poirier
Member of Standing Legal Committee (2)	Lauren Lancaster	Bowen Gao
DSP (6)	Gerard Buttigieg	Simone Maddison
	Grace Porter	Victor Zhang
	Jasper Arthur	Xueying Deng

¹ Satvik Sharma and Cooper Gannon submitted a joint nomination, permissible by way of the Constitution 6(e), which especially enables the joint nominations for Vice-President and General Secretary, but also for all other positions. There was a request from the floor to remove one of the pair after nominations had closed, but standing practice has it that the whole nomination must be removed and resubmitted. As a result, the pair were elected. Council may not have intended such joint nominations to have effect, but a Constitutional amendment is now necessary to revise this situation.

3. Preparation

Planning

The term of the Electoral Officer began on 12 April 2022.

Early in the process there were some discussions around utilising UKMSL services for an election portal for nominations and online absentee balloting. After some initial canvassing, this was set aside due to difficulties in developing a fit-for-purpose nominations and balloting system. Instead, it was resolved that we would use ElectionBuddy for absentee voters but that nominations would be handled out of the system.

Outside of this, the key early phase of planning focussed on developing the election timeline and preparing for the training of a fresh pool of Polling Booth Attendants. Staffing was identified as the primary challenge for the return to in-person elections.

The overarching month-by-month plan was to engage in general planning and framework building in June, preparing all comms copy and nominations in July, and proceeding to manage the nominations and elections lead-up process in August, with September obviously focussed on the elections themselves.

Communications Plan

The base of the communications plan was already in place, thanks to the years of experience of the Publications Managers, Mickie and Amanda. The Pub.s team decided that Mickie would have primary carriage over election communications to simplify work. The EO cannibalised last year's communications, with a new social media advert planned to attract staff who had worked for the AEC at the 2022 federal elections.

The key dates within the communication schedule are set by Regulations: the Notice of Elections, announcement of candidates after close of nominations, and announcement of election details in the lead up to the election dates. Because these dates come fast upon each other, preparing all communication copy in advance helps smooth the workloads for staff and the EO team.

Election Schedule

The election schedule is set by Regulations, and is reproduced below.

Week	Date	Event(s)
Week 1	1 August 2022	Notice of Elections and Opening of Nominations
Week 3	19 August 2022	Close of Nominations
Week 4	25 August 2022	Ballot Draw
Week 5	30 August 2022	Ballot Paper Draft Release
Week 6	7 September 2022	Online Campaigning Opens and Honi Soit Election Edition
Week 7	12 September 2022	Physical Campaigning Opens
Week 8	19-21 September 2022*	Polling Days

* In a great organisational inconvenience, the Queen died shortly before the polling days, leading to a public holiday scheduled for Thursday 22 September – not the Friday, since Victoria had its AFL Grand Final public holiday on that day. This led to a practical decision to reschedule polling to 18–20 September in order to conduct them in a single three day chunk. As will be discussed later in this Report, this had implications on turnout.

Technically, this decision has no regulatory basis, which meant that a pedantic complainant could have demanded the election go ahead on the originally scheduled dates.

Recommendation: That the SRC amend the Electoral Regulations to permit the EO to amend polling dates in the event of a foreseeable ‘act of God,’ not including mere rain, that would cause turnout to be radically diminished.

47.

(a) For the Annual Elections, the official polling days are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of Annual Election Week.

(b) For a by-election, the official polling day or days are the election date or dates prescribed by the Electoral Officer under section 3(c).

(c) The Electoral Officer may prescribe an alteration to the official polling days if they have reasonable grounds to believe that (a) some foreseeable extreme event will fall on one or more of the polling days, (b) such an event is likely to cause turnout to radically diminish or cause unsafe working conditions, and (c) all drawbacks to an alteration to the official polling days are substantially outweighed by the advantages.

(d) If the EO prescribes an alteration to the official polling days, notice to all campaigner managers, candidates, and the ELA must be distributed within four hours and notice must be published within twenty-four hours via the SRC Website, SRC social media channels, and Honi Soit website, as well as in the next print issue of Honi Soit. Such notice must include the email address of the ELA for submission of any appeal to this decision.

The proposed amendment cannot outright exclude ‘inclement weather’ or ‘rain’ because extreme storm conditions can conceivably occur such that the elections would be inoperable.

4. Electoral Roll

The electoral roll refers to the list of eligible voters for the SRC elections. Eligibility is defined by the Constitution:

(1) The Student Body of the University of Sydney shall consist of the whole number of students, whether matriculated or unmatriculated, who:

i. Enrol in a Bachelor's degree, an undergraduate diploma, or as a non degree student; and

ii. Who choose to be part of the Student Body for the purposes of this Constitution.

The normal process for producing this roll is simple: Chitra Narayanan (SRC Admin Manager) contacts university administration for enrolment information. They then provide the specified data, which we proceed to use for our roll. A separate list is requested from the University IT department in order to supply BigPulse with email addresses for online absentee voters.

In 2021, there were some mismatches in the data pulled from these different databases. As a result, I transmitted to the IT department the exact SQL query employed by University Records to generate their list, which allowed the data to reconcile.

Aside from this data management issue, there remains a regulatory issue hidden in the Constitution. In short, the meaning of 'enrol in a degree' is surprisingly difficult to establish. This is because, according to the University's policies, one enrolls in *units of study* and is *awarded* a degree. Are you an eligible voter if you are not enrolled in any classes for a given semester? That question is relevant for students who are 'deferred,' who we might say are 'enrolled' in a degree despite not being enrolled in classes. The question becomes still thornier, however, because students who 'defer' in fact 'suspend their studies' i.e., they do not enrol in classes but retain the right to later enrol. This was the conclusion that was adopted in the 2021 elections, though it did not arise in 2022.

Matters were much simpler from 1929 till 2006, when the clause read "duly enrolled for attendance at lectures."¹ (The changes in 2006 were due to the introduction of VSU.)² Matters remained simple during the reign of Paulene and Christine, who simply advertised the previous version of the clause.³ Subsequent EOs maintained the status quo, until 2020, when that EO made an alternate ruling. In 2021, therefore, we returned to the long-standing approach of EOs past.

Recommendation: That the SRC amend the Constitution to clarify eligibility to vote.

(1) The Student Body of the University of Sydney shall consist of the whole number of students who:

¹ See the original Constitution in the 1929 Honi Soit, Issue 9, page 2:
<https://digital.library.sydney.edu.au/nodes/view/2695#idx4864>

² Despite making these changes, the 2006 amendments retained the outdated language of 'matriculated or unmatriculated' which refers to a defunct examination of students early in their enrolment. Matriculation set apart those students who merely attended classes and those who were eligible for award of a degree at the conclusion of their studies. On reflection, this expresses both an elitist hoop for students to jump through as well as an ethos of allowing students to study for the sake of studying. In any case, these words have no effect today (or, rather, all students are unmatriculated since no student sits the examination).

³ See any Notice of Election in archived Honi Soits from 2007 onward.

- i. are duly enrolled for units of study in a Bachelor's degree, an undergraduate diploma, or as a non degree student; and
- ii. choose to be part of the Student Body for the purposes of this Constitution.

5. Nominations and BigPulse

Nominations

Nominations were handled via Google Form, which is a gladly functional service. This year, bulk nomination forms were introduced that enabled campaign managers or ticket heads to submit nominations for a group of candidates in a single form. Reportedly, this greatly simplified matters for candidates and campaign managers.

The nominations period opened on August 1 and closed on August 19. A substantial volume of nominations were received, though it was far simpler to process this year than last due to the improved submission system. One candidate nominated for President, and was duly elected; three candidates nominated for Honi Soit, but one was an invalid lone candidate and another was withdrawn before the ballots were drawn up. A total of 231 candidates across 51 tickets nominated for Council and 32 candidates nominated across 8 tickets for NUS. The vast majority of these were received via the bulk nomination form.

At least one campaigner remarked that the nominations period felt unusually short compared to past years. This is incorrect. In 2021, nominations opened on 5 August and closed 25 August – in that case, it opened the Wednesday before Week 1 and closed the Wednesday of Week 3, rather than the Monday of Week 1 and the Friday of Week 3 as was the case this year. In 2020, nominations opened 5 August and closed 26 August; In 2019, nominations opened 31 July and closed 21 August; in 2018, nominations opened 25 July and closed 15 August.

The rationale for shifting the opening and closing dates was simple. Since no nominations are received before semester, the addition of two days at the end of the period functionally extends the period. The weeks intervening between the close of nominations and the start of online campaigning made for ample time to process the nominations for the ballot and the Honi Soit Election Edition.

BigPulse

Drawing on the experience of 2021, the relationship with BigPulse was streamlined for the 2022 elections. Rather than employing their full services, their sole function within the elections was to provide an election portal for the receipt of online absentee voters. Since much of the project development had been refined in 2021, the BigPulse team were able to migrate a copy of the previous election portal, requiring only light editing. The primary administrative labour was incorporating the valid nominations data into the system, a laborious task undertaken by Deputy EO Morgan Westley.

Many of the cumbersome aspects of the BigPulse system were therefore avoided by the EO this year, either by minimising BigPulse's relevance, migrating last year's system, or delegating the work to someone else.

6. Election Period

Honi Soit Election Edition

In accordance with the Regulations and precedence, the data collected from nominations was repurposed for filling out the annual Election Edition of Honi Soit.

Once this data was accumulated, it was shared with the Honi Soit editorial team. As per precedent, they laid it up in a newspaper format which was then proofed to ensure that candidates were represented as they wished to be represented. Some unusual 'errors' by one editor were caught, and at least one was missed, but no complaints were received.

Finally, the Regulations stipulate that this edition have several important Regulations within, and so these were added.

The entire edition was available for campaign managers to proof before publication also, to ensure that candidates were represented as they wished to be represented.

A huge thank you is in order for the Honi Soit editorial team, as well as the SRC Publications Managers Amanda and Mickie, without whom this edition of Honi Soit would be impossible to put together.

Online Absentee Ballots

The Regulations prescribe online absentee ballots may be issued to voters who "are unable to attend a polling booth on all polling days" and if they meet certain conditions, as below.⁴

- (i) the elector will, on all polling days, be unable to attend a polling booth because of serious illness or infirmity, or approaching childbirth; or
- (ii) on all polling days, the elector will be unable to attend a polling booth because they will be occupied with caring for another person; or
- (iii) the elector is a person with a disability that will prevent them from attending a polling booth on all polling days; or
- (iv) on all polling days, the elector will be outside NSW without any reasonable means of returning to NSW in time for any polling day.

A total of 252 absentee applications were received, of which 149 were issued online ballots. The primary reason for a rejected absentee vote application was that it was defective. The Google Form included five options for why applicants were unable to attend a polling booth: one for each of the four reasons above and a "none of the above option." The above Regulations were included at the top of the Google Form.

It also included a question asking the applicant to briefly outline more about their circumstances. The Regulations allow me to require any evidence I so desire: the capacity to give a brief written comment fitting the regulations was my preferred minimal threshold.

⁴ Strictly speaking, electors must be issued a postal ballot in the first instance before being issued an online ballot, which they may receive only if "in that elector's circumstances, postal voting is not a practical method of casting a vote." This was true of all electors, because there were no postal ballots.

Even so, many applicants failed to pass this exceptionally low bar. Any applicant who wrote in a valid reason was issued a ballot, even if their ticked option did not match their comment e.g. “None of the above” and “I will be overseas”. Any applicant who ticked “none of the above” and wrote a reason outside the scope of the Regulations was *not* issued a ballot. Any applicant who ticked a valid reason but wrote a comment or reason not fitting any valid reason was not issued a ballot. In some rare cases, if their application was unusually defective (e.g. ticked all boxes), the application was also rejected.

Some selected responses follow. As you can see, some are matters of personal inconvenience (e.g. “I really can’t be bothered to go there in person.”), or were a result of poor campaign communications (e.g. “I don’t get information about that.”), or were legitimate concerns outside of the scope of the Regulations (e.g. the long teaching placement comment.)

Selected Reason	Written Comment
None of the above / other	COVID
Because I will be occupied with caring for another person	I was busy with my work and take care with my friends
None of the above / other	My parents are going on holidays overseas so I need to stay home and take care of the dog etc
None of the above / other	Hah
None of the above / other	I don't have time to go offline.
None of the above / other	I am currently on my teaching professional experience placement and will be until September 23rd. As a requirement to complete the placement, and thereby complete my degree, I need to be present at the school every school day. School hours vary, and I also have to be present at staff meetings, so generally my days finish around 4pm. It also will take me over an hour and a half to make it to campus. Consequently I will be unable to make polling days on campus.
None of the above / other	I don't get information about that
None of the above / other	Because I feel inconvenient to vote offline, it costs me a lot of unnecessary time.
Because of serious illness or infirmity, or approaching childbirth	Amazing
None of the above / other	I really can't be bothered to go there in person
Because of serious illness or infirmity, or approaching childbirth, None of the above / other	I need to do my own business.

Recommendation: That the SRC amend the absentee ballot regulations to rationalise the system.

The full proposed amendment is available in Appendix C.

Polling Days

As has been indicated earlier in this report, the primary concern with the return to in-person elections was ensuring that there was an adequate skill base to administer the polls and conduct the count. Two training sessions were hosted to ensure that staff understood their roles, and a number of experienced and reliable booth captains were handpicked to have primary carriage over each booth. Overall, I am greatly satisfied with the performance of the PBAs.

Some logistical preparation was necessary to run the polling days. It is essential that ballots are issued to booths in a secure fashion: every booth was allocated a numbered set of ballots out of our stock of 7000 ballots, and only a small stock was released to each booth at any given time. A stocktake was conducted at the end of each day to match records of issued ballots with the ballots returned to the office.

My role rotated between checking in on booths, handling staff concerns, and dealing with campaign issues – greatly assisted by bicycle mobility. In general, campaign issues were infrequent and minor. Some rulings were issued against candidates, but these were warnings in the main.

There were some voter issues to note. First, voters who registered for an online ballot but wished to vote in-person appeared on the roll with a highlighted mark on their name. These voters were required to receive a declaration vote, which would be checked at the count to ensure that they had not double-voted. Second, some other voters did not appear on the roll at all. This can occur because of human error in locating a name, alphabetisation issues in the order of the roll, or because they were not pulled from the database in the first place. In the first two cases, we can resolve them by checking their SID at the count against the electronic master copy of the roll. In the latter case, we generally have to reject those ballots unless positive proof is provided at the count of that voter's eligibility. One such ballot was included on this basis.

Counting the ballots

The ballot count was conducted from Saturday onwards. Normally, the count begins on the evening of the last day of polling with the President and Honi Soit ballots. Without either ballot in the running, this expedited count was not necessary. In addition, the Thursday public holiday rendered it uneconomical to begin the count on that day. Finally, there was a miscommunication with University room booking services about when we would have access to the count room – it was in use for Friday prayers, and we had been told that we would have access in the early afternoon on Friday – but it would only become available on Friday evening.

One deviation from an ordinary count procedure relates to how we handled the online ballots. Rather than store that data electronically and (a) run the risk of manual errors or (b) leave those ballots without any easy scrutiny, we hand-copied out the online ballots. However, rather than print out all ballots, we only copied out one ballot for every identical preference order. Every person who voted *for the exact same people in the exact same order* would be lumped in with each other and labelled with the total number of votes with that preference order. To be clear, this does not mean that we combine two ballots with the same primary preference but different second, third, and so on preferences. Only if every preference is the same would we aggregate preferences.

The point is that this simplifies the counting process since an arbitrary number of ballots can be counted with only a single sheet of paper. This process is, of course, only possible with an online ballot. Because of the large number of possible preferences, however, relatively few ballots were identical.

In addition to this administrative exercise, we conducted an inspection of the rolls to determine if there was a substantial risk of double-voting. This is perhaps more of a concern with the Presidential election, where fifty votes might decide the results. Our method was to inspect random pages across all rolls and compare the recorded voters.

As for the count itself, we simply move papers around and record how many went where at what value. Some irksome ballots have a habit of being mis-sorted, which leads to a *fun* unscrambling of the egg to resolve that problem.

Discussion of Turnout

The primary issue to raise is the turnout. As expected, there were fewer votes than in the online elections of preceding years, because an email sent to your inbox is easier to access than the physical booths. Of course, it is important to stress that the qualitative content of such votes dramatically differs in online elections since close to zero engagement with campaign platforms occurs in such contexts for the majority of voters. More significant was the decline in engagement relative to past in-person elections, where the 2022 elections recorded under half of previous totals. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, the University continued to operate remote learning for a large proportion of students, likely more than half of the undergraduate population. Without exact figures of student population growth and how many classes were conducted online, it is difficult to estimate how much this effect is responsible for the turnout. Nevertheless, a conservative guess is that this is responsible for at least half of the decline, and it is likely that this caused closer to three-quarters of the decline. With TEQSA instructing universities to end offshore learning by Semester Two and the University of Sydney responding by effectively dropping remote learning for all domestic students, we can expect a return towards pre-COVID student densities on campus for the 2023 elections.

Second, the largely uncontested nature of the elections meant that campaign motivations were lower than in comparable in-person elections. Without a contested Honi Soit election, an entire pool of campaigners are not drawn into the elections. Without a contested Presidential election, there is less at stake and a lessened narrative of why this matters for more peripheral campaigners. These facts are borne out by the relatively superb performances of Left Action and Student Left Alliance, who are not driven to the same extent by the presence or absence of a presidential campaign.

Third, the absence of in-person elections over the past two years has led to a general hollowing-out of campaign skillsets. It is no small feat to persuade a voter to wait in line and submit a ballot for an organisation with which they may only have passing familiarity. Given the churn of student populations, it is unsurprising to see wheels being reinvented – sometimes in square shapes.

Separately, it is worth mentioning the differences in turnout between the Council and NUS ballots. They were, in fact, rather close, with Council receiving 1756 votes and NUS receiving 1709 votes. Ordinarily, a far greater variation is visible in these elections, with NUS often receiving substantially fewer votes. This is largely due to voter fatigue in elections with four separate ballot papers: completion rates are highest on the simplest and most-comprehensible ballots. With just two ballots at play, the differences in turnout vanished.

In last year's report, I observed that online elections lead to a diminished engagement by voters, which was reflected by the great disparity within turnout – larger than for in-person elections. We can expect that a substantial number of voters were not engaged last year, because the pathway to voting is merely receiving an email and proceeding to vote online. Some information is available in the form of policy statements, and the like, but this is a rather denuded substitute for campaign engagement. Campaigners, therefore, are a valuable resource for both the SRC and the University at large, because their explanations of student politics advertise key avenues of student representation.

Election	Vote Total*
NUS Delegates	1709
Representatives to Council	1756

* Note that these figures exclude invalid ballots, where Council saw 69 informal ballots and NUS saw 106 informal ballots. In addition to informal ballots, some number of ballots are issued but never turned in – 61 for Council and 68 for NUS.

7. Representatives-Elect

Generally, the Representatives-Elect meeting proceeded simply enough, though one would be forgiven for thinking otherwise. There are a few points that need to be addressed, however.

Nominations

Last year, we discovered that the online-only nominations system was unwieldy. We therefore required paper nominations, with an online option for those unable to be present. This meant that reviewing the forms for errors was easier and instructions for corrections were simpler to issue. This helped ensure that nominations were valid – a difficult task given the great variety and complexity of nomination requirements across all the Officers and Committee Members of the SRC.

Changes to the system

Previously, the SRC elected one or two positions for any given office, with each of those positions able to be jointly held. Regulation changes in 2022 regularised this practice by establishing four separate positions for the majority of offices, retaining the jointly-held system for certain key roles. This largely simplified matters, especially with regard to managing Affirmative Action, where there were complexities of interpretation in how to apply AA across jointly-held roles.

New ‘active member requirements’ were introduced, however, which were less than clearly set out in the Regulations.

4A. Active member requirements

Nominees for the position of Environment, Ethnocultural, Disabilities, First Nations, International Students, Women’s, or Queer Officer must be active members of the respective Collective or Department of each office.

(a) An active member of a Collective or Department is defined as a member who has attended two meetings of that Collective or Department in that Academic year.

(b) Where a Collective has autonomously preselected a student to be nominated for the position of Environment, Ethnocultural, Disabilities, First Nations, International Students, Women’s, or Queer Officer, the returning officer may only accept their nomination and no others, provided it also satisfies the requirements at s4 and s4A(a)-(b).

(c) The active member requirement does not apply to a Department where there are as many or fewer nominees as there are vacancies for the position of Officer of that Department or where the Department has been vacant for more than one month prior.

On initial interpretation, the EO ruled that 4A(c) unpins the whole section if its condition is met. This meant that if nominations were less than or equal to the number of vacancies, the requirement to be an active member had to be set aside. The Chair of Standing Legal ruled otherwise, interpreting 4A(c) as only negating the effect of the prefatory clause and 4A(a). Accepting that view, the issue of drafting at hand is that 4A(b) is unlike the remainder of the section and belongs, properly, in section 4 “Affirmative action provisions.”

8. Complaints

Electoral Legal Arbiter

The ELA for 2022 was Edward McMahon. No inquiries for advice were issued by the EO to the ELA.

Complaints

In 2021, a large volume of complaints were received. In 2022, a very small number of complaints were received. In large part this had to do with the less hotly contested nature of the elections, but I imagine my publicised aversion to trivial complaints at the candidates briefings contributed somewhat.

Those issues which I did deal with I largely resolved on the ground, or in communication with campaign managers e.g. issues around appropriate identification of campaigners, inappropriate storage of campaign materials in SRC offices, non-students engaged in campaigning, campaigning inside exclusion zones, or campaigning in a LOTE. The largely marginal nature of these issues warrant only marginal commentary in this report.

I remind candidates that these rules should be followed for a reason.

Only one offence led to any serious further action; namely, the banning of a campaigner in the last remaining hour or so of the election. This offence was appealed promptly to the ELA, who rang the EO at around 6.30PM that day. As it was after the close of the elections, and any ruling would have null effect, the ELA decided to note the appeal and take no further action, confirming that decision in written form on Friday September 23 at 11.27AM.

Appendix A: Campaign Expenditures

The table for all stated expenditures is below.

Brand / Ticket	Expenditure Limit	Reported Spend
Left Action	\$ 1,300.00	\$ 1,288.79
Grassroots	\$ 2,100.00	\$ 1,056.74
Amplify	\$ 1,700.00	\$ 921.48
Switch	\$ 2,100.00	\$ 826.57
Lift	\$ 1,300.00	\$ 679.43
Student Left Alliance	\$ 400.00	\$ 395.57
Stand Up	\$ 1,300.00	\$ 320.87
Gymbros	\$ 300.00	\$ 233.89
Colleges	\$ 400.00	\$ 141.24
Penta	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 45.00
Multis / Deez	\$ 200.00	\$ 39.50
INTERPOL / Independents	\$ 1,600.00	\$ 36.00
Students First	\$ 300.00	\$ 0.75
Artistry	\$ 400.00	\$ -
Edbert Felix Lim	\$ 100.00	\$ -
Engineers	\$ 1,200.00	\$ -
Lefties	\$ 400.00	\$ -
Student Reps for Colleges	\$ 100.00	\$ -
Your mom	\$ 400.00	\$ -

Appendix B: Election Expenditures

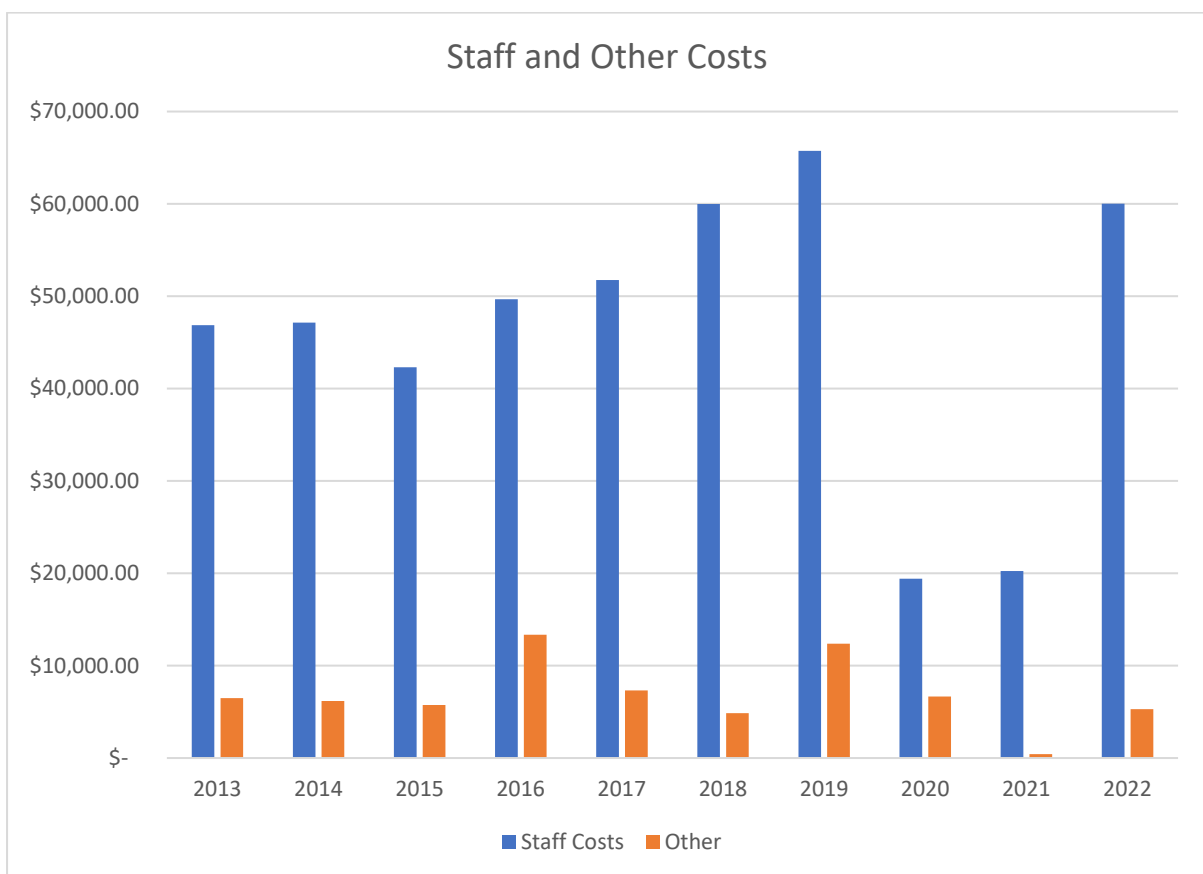
	Item	Notes	Expenses
Staffing	Wages	Including superannuation	\$76,267.58
	Misc. staff reimbursements	Includes travel costs, parking, etc.	\$79.03
Subtotal			\$76,346.61
Communications	Ballot Printing		\$4,393.24
	Roll Printing	Printing of electoral rolls for booths	\$1,200.52
	Social media ad	Job advert for hiring PBAs	\$200.00
Subtotal			\$5,793.76
Miscellaneous	Miscellaneous	Stationery, etc	\$933.96
Grand total			\$83,074.33

The expenses for the 2022 Annual Elections outpaced the SSAF allocation, which has remained fixed in the face of inflation. The SRC's election funding is drawn out of the negotiable pool at each SSAF negotiation, which implies that either the negotiable funding needs to be increased in line with future cost growth or expenses need to be minimised for elections.

The below tables and graph depict the trajectory of election expenses from 2013 to 2022.

Election Expenses (Nominal \$)			
	Staff Costs	Other	Total
2013	\$ 48,507.61	\$ 6,718.24	\$ 55,225.85
2014	\$ 50,031.11	\$ 6,559.63	\$ 56,590.74
2015	\$ 45,569.82	\$ 6,182.98	\$ 51,752.80
2016	\$ 54,193.45	\$ 14,556.81	\$ 68,750.26
2017	\$ 57,559.32	\$ 8,138.42	\$ 65,697.74
2018	\$ 67,966.27	\$ 5,499.70	\$ 73,465.97
2019	\$ 75,668.87	\$ 14,251.23	\$ 89,920.10
2020	\$ 22,544.45	\$ 7,730.31	\$ 30,274.76
2021	\$ 24,176.64	\$ 502.38	\$ 24,679.02
2022	\$ 76,346.61	\$ 6,727.72	\$ 83,074.33

Election Expenses (2011-12 Constant \$)			
	Staff Costs	Other	Total
2013	\$ 46,867.26	\$ 6,491.05	\$ 53,358.31
2014	\$ 47,154.67	\$ 6,182.50	\$ 53,337.17
2015	\$ 42,311.81	\$ 5,740.93	\$ 48,052.74
2016	\$ 49,673.19	\$ 13,342.63	\$ 63,015.82
2017	\$ 51,761.98	\$ 7,318.72	\$ 59,080.70
2018	\$ 59,987.88	\$ 4,854.10	\$ 64,841.99
2019	\$ 65,741.85	\$ 12,381.61	\$ 78,123.46
2020	\$ 19,418.13	\$ 6,658.32	\$ 26,076.45
2021	\$ 20,248.44	\$ 420.75	\$ 20,669.20
2022	\$ 60,020.92	\$ 5,289.09	\$ 65,310.01



As you can see, there is a steady growth in staffing costs beginning in 2015–16. The drop in expenditures in 2020 and 2021 is due to the use of online elections, which the SRC adopted as an emergency measure during pandemic conditions. Both the SRC and SUPRA have returned to in-person elections, with SUPRA set to conduct an in-person election at its 2023 Annual Elections.

A number of factors has driven the upwards trend in staffing costs for the SRC elections, and which will continue into the future. First, while inflation has represented a relatively minor effect across the 2010s due to historic lows, the 2022 inflation figures reached 6.5%. Projections for future inflation are expected to be beneath the 2022 figures, but are likely to remain above the 2010 averages. Since staff wages, including casual rates, are set by the SRC EBA as growing in line with inflation, this will represent an ongoing nominal growth in election expenses.

Second, and more substantially, there has been an increased cost of operating polling booths. With respect to polling days, staffing costs are a function of the number of booths, booth operation hours, and expected turnout at each booth. Across the 2013–2022 period (ignoring the online interregnum of 20–21), the number of booths remained stable, although there were variations in location and opening-closing hours. The overall number of hours of operation remained stable between 2013–2018 remained constant at 68.5, with a modest decline in 2022 to 61 hours. Hours of operation do not include set up and pack down time, which adds additional costs, and which is modestly higher in the case of satellite campus booths. These are relatively static variables in accounting for polling booth costs. What has varied has been the number of staff employed per booth.

Complete historical figures are not available for staffing numbers per booth. However, the number of staff hired for the elections depends on the projected voter turnout, which has been steadily growing across the same period in line with student enrolments. The below table shows voter turnout compared against enrolments. Voter turnout, however, is a jointly determined result, hinging on enrolments, degree of electoral contestation, as well as booth throughput. This last element is the only factor within the control of the Electoral Officer.

	Enrolments (from USYD Annual Reports)	Turnout ⁵
2013	33219	4391
2014	33505	4326
2015	33253	3113
2016	33385	4357
2017	34012	4269
2018	35351	4370
2019	37146	5732
¹⁰ 2020	35484	3164
⁶ 2021	41125	6442
2022	[not released]	1849

A marked jump in staffing expenses occurred across the 2018–2019 elections, due to the change in election administration from Paulene Graham to Casper Lu (2018) and Karen Chau (2019). Under Paulene, relatively few staff were employed on polling booths, which was identified as a constraint on voter turnout and election accessibility due to long queues at key booths such as Fisher Library or JFR. The same staffing model was adopted for the 2022 elections, although some surplus positions were eliminated from the 2018-19 model. (As it turned out, the 2022 booth throughput capacity far exceeded needs due to diminished voter turnout, as discussed in Section 6 of this Report.)

The third factor driving staff costs is the cost of the counting period. Unlike polling days, where costs are driven by expected voter turnout and consequently staff capacity needs, the costs of counting is a function of count complexity. A larger quantity of votes takes longer to count, but this effect becomes magnified when we consider complex multi-seat elections with large number of possible preference distributions. Consider, for example, how Federal elections conclude within an evening for Lower House seats but Upper House seats take weeks to conclude. Of course, more staff are employed on election

⁵ Turnout figures are indicative, since they are drawn from a variety of sources and may represent formal ballots cast in one election – usually the Presidential election – as opposed to total ballot returns or total ballots issued.

⁶ The 2020 and 2021 results are online elections, where 2020 required voter registration – constraining turnout – and 2021 was distributed to all valid elector emails – increasing turnout.

night than in the following period, but this is in part because additional staff give diminishing returns for counting speed in a more complex ballot.⁷

The complexity of the ballot is effectively determined by the number of possible preference orders, and therefore by the number of tickets and candidates on a given ballot. The SRC infamously has a large ‘tablecloth’ ballot for the Council election, with this year numbering 231 candidates across 51 tickets. This is the primary cause for the length of the count period and therefore its cost.

Accompanying count complexity as a driver of counting costs is the degree of precision demanded by the Electoral Officer. In 2018 and 2019, there was an increase in precision. This matters because the margins between candidates in the race are often quite small. A single misallocated ballot paper can alter the running candidate totals, and therefore who is elected or eliminated. Since control of Council can hinge on a single Representative being elected or not, this can have dramatic flow-on effects in terms of who occupies key paid roles, funding distributions within the SRC, and more.

In 2021, it was realised that PBAs were entitled to overtime and weekend penalty rates, which had not been consistently applied in past elections. This was not significant for that election, because there were limited staff expenses, but it became relevant in 2022. Payment of appropriate entitlements is important for the SRC, given the financial and media risks associated with underpayment, and doing otherwise would be inconsistent with its publicly stated views on appropriate worker compensation. The counting period typically overlaps with at least one weekend immediately following election week, and potentially the following weekend as well. The SRC EBA sets weekend penalty rates at double time.

Printing expenses

The pandemic period saw supply constraints and price increases across paper stock, which led to increased prices for printing ballot papers. The below table and graph summarises quoted prices for ballot paper printing between 2016 and 2019 as well as the 2022 quoted prices. As you can see, there was a substantial jump in prices between 2019 and 2022, particularly in A2 paper stock. Another printer who we asked to quote on printing was unable to fulfil A2 printing, indicating the possibility that supply constraints were especially sharp for A2 paper.

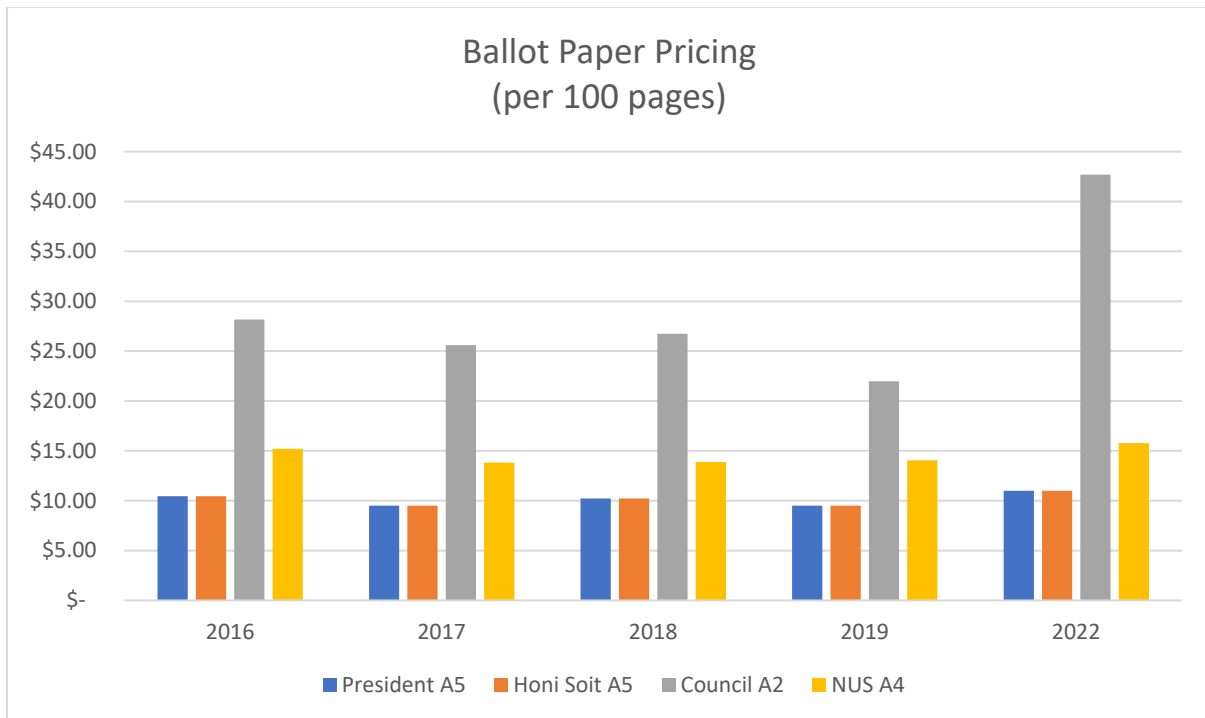
Ballot Paper Pricing 2016–2022 (per 100 pages)⁸				
	President A5	Honi Soit A5	Council A2	NUS A3
2016	\$ 10.45	\$ 10.45	\$ 28.17	\$ 15.20
2017	\$ 9.50	\$ 9.50	\$ 25.61	\$ 13.82
2018	\$ 10.23	\$ 10.23	\$ 26.74	\$ 13.89
2019 ⁹	\$ 9.50	\$ 9.50	\$ 21.96	\$ 14.04
2022	\$ 11.00	\$ 11.00	\$ 42.70	\$ 15.78
Mean	\$ 10.14	\$ 10.14	\$ 29.03	\$ 14.55
Δ% 19-22	16%	16%	94%	12%

While across-the-board downward pressure on paper prices appears unlikely, one hopes that the A2 price will normalise in line with other paper stock.

⁷ Setting aside the use of ballot input and counting software.

⁸ This draws on quoted prices – actual prices may vary somewhat.

⁹ Actual printing expenses per 100 pages were somewhat higher in 2019 because a secondary order was placed after higher than anticipated prepoll returns. Rapid print services attract an additional premium.



Expenses analysis of the 2022 SRC Elections

In real terms, the staffing costs in the 2022 Annual Elections declined modestly from the previous high in 2019, from \$65741.85 to \$57071.92, expressed in 2011-12 constant dollars. This reflected the decision to remove a surplus roles from the booth allocation model employed in that year, as well as the modest decline in hours of operation (as set by the revised Regulations). The counting period was mildly shorter than past in-person elections, due to a somewhat smaller ballot for the Council election. Countervailing that, penalty rates were applied on the one weekend that the count period overlapped.

The penalty rate costs occurred due to external circumstances. In 2022, the count of the Council and NUS ballots began on Saturday, whereas these counts normally begin on a Friday (with President and Honi occurring on Thursday evening). The room booking was intended to begin on Friday around noon, but it became apparent late in the piece that it would only become available on Friday afternoon. The first few hours of work in the count room involve setting up the room and an initial unpacking and sorting of the ballot boxes. Unlike the later phases of the count, this is expedited by more labour. This was not viable to conduct in the late afternoon of Friday.

In addition, given the relative inexperience of the staffing pool, it was not apparent who would be most appropriate to retain for the remainder of the count period. The intention was to use this initial phase of the count to identify the best candidates for staying on for the count. (Normally, this process occurs during the Presidential and Honi Soit counts on Thursday evening, but these elections were not in play.) As a result, we were forced to begin on Saturday with a large number of staff, who accrued overtime pay. Nevertheless, the total wages bill remained beneath the 2019 and 2018 elections in real terms, where penalty rates were not applied.

Turning to other sundry costs: the primary component of non-staffing expenses is the printing cost for the ballot papers, discussed above. The absence of the Presidential and Honi Soit ballots led to lower costs overall, even with the increased A2 pricing. The remainder of the electoral expenses were miscellaneous funds expended for travel, parking, etc.

In retrospect, the diminished voter turnout might have been better anticipated, and a consequent reduction in staffing numbers per booth and ballot papers ordered would have led to decreased costs for the SRC. However, with a return to in-person elections occurring after two years and the general uncertainty of campus life, I preferred to err on the safe side. The sharp decline in turnout was larger than any expectations – a sub-2000 return was outside of expectations.

Recommendations for future election budgets

1. Retain the current staffing framework for polling days.
 - a. With enrolments increasing and on-campus student densities likely to return to pre-COVID figures, voter turnout is likely to see a gradual return to 5000+. The SRC will need to secure adequate funds from SSAF to ensure manageable booth throughput. Some additional finetuning of the booth allocation model will help optimise the cost to throughput ratio.
2. Investigate methods to simplify the Council ballot paper
 - a. It is likely that the ballot paper will expand from the 2022 figure, exacerbating count complexity, length, and costs. The current system does not contain any intrinsic democratic advantages and, arguably, presents an impediment to democratic accessibility for students.
3. Remove the CPC polling booth
 - a. The Charles Perkins Centre booth reported 29 ballots issued. The CPC booth was the replacement for the old Cumberland satellite campus booth, which usually returned at least 100 votes. Given the incorporation of that cohort into the Camperdown campus, it is not clear that a CPC booth merits the cost of operation. The Engineering campus is a borderline case, given its close proximity to JFR, but at least it managed to return over 100 votes. The Conservatorium of Music booth is justified on the basis that the main campus is inaccessible. Removing the CPC booth will save around \$700.
4. Increase the Electoral Officer stipend
 - a. The EO stipend has remained at \$12,000 until 2022, when it was increased by 2.9% (the Q2 inflation figure) in 2022 (i.e. below actual annual inflation). It is not clear when it was last increased before this, though to give some context Paulene had been asking for an increase for *years* by 2014. In real terms, this means that it is equal to \$9,433.96 in 2011-12 constant dollars. *At minimum*, to return it to inflation parity with 2011-12, it would need to be raised to \$15264. Call it a round \$16,000.

Indicative 2023 budget

Assume 4.0% inflation in 2023, as per RBA forecast.

Item	Budget	Notes
Staffing costs	\$ 80,000	Applying a 4% increase on current staffing costs brings us to \$75,499, plus \$4,000 and change (super) for the additional stipend. This assumes that booths are not cancelled, since there may be elements of council opposed to the reduction of booth operation or seeking the expansion of some booths (such as Engineering or the Conservatorium).
Ballot + roll printing	\$ 6,500	Assume a four-ballot election with voter turnout returning to pre-pandemic figures and no relaxation in paper pricing.
Tables	\$ 500	The current booth tables in use have fallen into disrepair. About eight to ten replacement tables will help cover it. This is a one time capital expenditure.
Sundry	\$ 500	Travel, parking, stationery, boxes, etc
Contingency	\$ 750	10% of non-staffing costs.
TOTAL	\$ 88250	

A more relaxed budget estimate:

Item	Budget	Notes
Staffing costs	\$ 77,000.00	Assume an 8% reduction in staffing hours via various means (\$700 savings in the CPC booth, reduced staffing on Saturday) plus a 4% increase in the wage-rate and the increased stipend.
Ballot + roll printing	\$ 4,200.00	Order 5000 ballots, which will safely cover a turnout of between 3000–4000 with room to spare. Assume A2 pricing drops to \$30 with rolls costing \$800.
Sundry	\$ 500.00	Travel, parking, stationery, boxes, etc
Contingency	\$ 470.00	10% of non-staffing costs.
TOTAL	\$ 82,170.00	

In principle, staffing costs can drop further if the Council is willing to accept diminished booth throughput.

The current SSAF allocation is \$63,500, which has not been increased over the years.

Appendix C: Absentee Ballot Amendments

The below amendments simplify and improve upon the current absentee vote process. There is much that is unnecessarily complex within the current version. The proposed amendments offer a choice to Council of whether it prefers absentee votes to occur via postal or online means. Council should pick one and stick to it.

In practice, given the timing of the elections and the slowness of the postal system, postal absentee votes have always been a negligible number in SRC elections. The AEC standard for postal votes (e.g. union ballots) is to use a four-week return window. On this schedule, ballots would need to be issued in Week 5 (i.e. four weeks before Election Week) – but this is more-or-less when the ballot paper is *drafted* let alone printed. The soonest a ballot can be posted is around two weeks before Election Week, which means that the voter may receive it up to a week later and, if they return it immediately, it may barely scrape in before the close of voting.

As such, postal voting is an impractical method. The choice is Council's.

Division 9 – Absentee Voting

54. ELIGIBILITY FOR ABSENTEE VOTING

(a) Electors are eligible to become an absentee voter if they are unable to attend a polling booth on all polling days.

(b) An elector is unable to attend a polling booth on all polling days if, and only if:

(i) the elector will, on all polling days, be unable to attend a polling booth because of serious illness or infirmity, or approaching childbirth; or

(ii) the elector will, on all polling days, be unable to attend a polling booth because they will be occupied with caring for another person; or

(iii) the elector is a person with a disability that will prevent them from attending a polling booth on all polling days; or

(iv) the elector will, on all polling days, be outside Greater Sydney without any reasonable means of returning to Greater Sydney in time for any polling day; or,

(v) in the view of the Electoral Officer, the elector has some other extraordinary circumstance(s) preventing them from attending a polling booth on all polling days.

(c) An elector is not unable to attend a polling booth on all polling days if they are able to attend a pre-polling polling booth established under section 50(d).

55. ABSENTEE VOTER APPLICATIONS

(a) The Electoral Officer must prescribe an absentee voter application form, which must require applicants to state:

(i) their name;

(ii) their student identification number;

(iii) their Sydney University email address; and

- (v) the grounds on which they are applying;
- (vi) any other detail the Electoral Officer considers necessary.

(c) The absentee voter application form must be advertised through Honi Soit, the SRC website, and SRC social media.

(d) Applications to become an absentee voter may be submitted by completing the form and returning it to the Electoral Officer.

(e) The deadline for applications is a day determined by the Electoral Officer that provides for the fair and efficient conduct of the election.

(f) The Electoral Officer may receive late applications if they consider it fair and efficient to do so.

(g) The Electoral Officer may, if they consider it fair and efficient to do so, accept an application for absentee voting that does not use the absentee voter application form.

56. DETERMINING WHO IS AN ABSENTEE VOTER

(a) The Electoral Officer must declare an applicant is an absentee voter if they are satisfied that the applicant is an elector and is eligible to become an absentee voter.

(b) The Electoral Officer must declare an applicant is not an absentee voter if they are satisfied that the applicant is either not an elector or is not eligible to become an absentee voter.

(c) When making any declaration under this section, the Electoral Officer must immediately inform the applicant:

- (i) of the substance of the declaration; and,
- (ii) if the application was rejected, that they may appeal the decision to the Electoral Legal Arbitrator; and,
- (iii) not inform any other person, unless that person is an electoral official, that the declaration has been made.

57. METHOD OF ABSENTEE VOTING – ONLINE

(a) The Electoral Officer must allow absentee voters to vote using an Online Voting System.

(c) The Electoral Officer must, for the purposes of this section, select an Online Voting System which the Electoral Officer considers appropriate for the fair and efficient conduct of the election.

(d) The Electoral Officer must not select an Online Voting System unless they are satisfied the system will:

- (i) in some way register the identities of those who have cast an online absentee vote;
- (ii) provide online absentee voters with instructions on how to cast a valid vote;
- (iii) allow online absentee voters to indicate their preferences in accordance with the requirements of preferential voting under the Constitution;
- (iv) prevent online absentee voters from voting more than once in a given ballot;
- (v) prevent a person from voting if they are not an online absentee voter;

- (vi) not allow any person to determine how an online absentee voter has voted;
- (vii) ensure that votes cast using the Online Voting System can be tallied together with the normal method of voting used during that election; and
- (viii) comply with the Constitution and Regulations.

(e) By 9 am on the first polling day, the Electoral Officer must:

- (i) explain to all online absentee voters where an online copy of the Election Edition of Honi Soit may be found;
- (ii) provide all online absentee voters with the means of using the Online Voting System selected for absentee voting for that election;
- (iii) provide all online absentee voters with instructions on how to use the Online Voting System;

(f) To be included in the count, all online absentee votes cast using an Online Voting System must be received by the close of voting on the last polling day of the election.

(g) Notwithstanding anything in this Division, if the Electoral Officer is satisfied that online absentee voting will not promote the fair and efficient conduct of the election, then they must declare that no elector is eligible to become an online absentee voter. Any such declaration must appear on the SRC website.

OR

57. METHOD OF ABSENTEE VOTING – POSTAL

(a) The Electoral Officer must allow absentee voters to vote via postal vote.

(b) The Electoral Officer must ensure that all absentee voters are given reasonable opportunity to provide their Australian residential address for receipt of their postal voting package.

(c) If an absentee voter does not provide details of their Australian residential address to the Electoral Officer, they will not be entitled to cast a postal absentee vote.

(d) If an absentee voter provides details of their Australian residential address to the Electoral Officer, the Electoral Officer must send the absentee voter a postal voting package no later than seven days before the last polling day.

(e) An absentee vote is not invalid merely because the Electoral Officer sent the absentee voter their postal voting package later than seven days before the last polling day.

(g) A postal voting package must contain:

- (i) ballot papers, authorised by the Electoral Officer, for each of the ballots in which the absentee voter is an elector;
- (ii) a print copy of the Election Edition of Honi Soit, or an explanation of where an online copy may be found;
- (iii) a Declaration Form;
- (iv) instructions on how to validly cast a postal vote, including the stipulations in 57(h)

- (v) a reply-paid envelope for the return of voting materials to the Electoral Officer; and
- (vi) anything else the Electoral Officer considers necessary for the fair and efficient conduct of the election.

(h) An absentee vote may only be accepted if:

- (i) it is received before the close of voting;
- (ii) the Declaration Form is properly completed by the absentee voter
- (ii) the absentee voter has complied with any other instructions the Electoral Officer considers necessary to the fair and efficient conduct of the election.

Appendix D: Miscellaneous Amendments

AMENDMENT 1

24(b) A candidate in the ballot for Representatives, Honi Soit Editors or NUS Delegates may withdraw their nomination by sending a signed statement of withdrawal to the Electoral Officer at any time before the Declaration of Final Results.

24A(a) If, at any time after submitting their nomination form, before the Declaration of Final Results, a candidate dies, the Electoral Officer must:

- (i) declare that candidate to be no longer eligible for election in any ballot; and
- (ii) where possible remove that candidate's name from the ballot paper in respect of each ballot that candidate was contesting.

AMEND TO

24(b) A candidate in the ballot for Representatives, Honi Soit Editors or NUS Delegates may withdraw their nomination by sending a signed statement of withdrawal to the Electoral Officer at any time before the close of voting

24A(a) If, at any time after submitting their nomination form, but before the close of voting, a candidate dies, the Electoral Officer must:

- (i) declare that candidate to be no longer eligible for election in any ballot; and
- (ii) where possible remove that candidate's name from the ballot paper in respect of each ballot that candidate was contesting.

RATIONALE

The effect of the current clauses is to require a full re-count of the ballot if the withdrawal happens at any time after counting begins. Not only does this imply large delays in the counting process beyond the time and wages budgeted for, it carries the risk of miscounting given that ballots may be mislaid during the re-sorting process.

AMENDMENT 2

Delete 50(a)(iii)C. Cumberland campus between 10:45am and 3:15pm;

Delete the Savings Provision in the same section

(e) Subsections (e) and (f) apply to the conduct of the Annual Elections only.

(f) Before issuing the Notice of Voting Dates, Times and Places, the Electoral Officer must make enquiries to determine whether the majority of students in the Faculty of Health Sciences have moved from the Cumberland campus to the Susan Wakil Health Building.

(g) If, after making such enquiries, the Electoral Officer is satisfied the majority of students in the Faculty of Health Sciences have moved to the Susan Wakil Health Building, the Electoral Officer must:

- (i) not establish a polling booth at the Cumberland campus; but
- (ii) instead establish a polling booth, to open on polling days, at or around either:

- 1) the Susan Wakil Health Building; or
- 2) the Charles Perkins Centre.

RATIONALE

These clauses established a polling booth for the Cumberland campus, which no longer exists. Provisions were inserted to establish a booth at CPC / Susan Wakil, which saw just 29 votes returns. These booths are unnecessary and, as discussed in Appendix B, the elimination of this booth would save around \$700 in wages.

AMENDMENT 3

Add

50(i) In the event of any NTEU staff industrial action (strikes, pickets, or stop work actions) occurring at any other university in Greater Sydney scheduled on a polling day, the Electoral Officer may cease operations for the duration of the industrial action if the NTEU Sydney Branch Committee makes that request to the EO. The Electoral Officer must make any determination under this clause in consultation with the President.

RATIONALE

In the current Regulations, 50(h) requires the Electoral Officer to cease operation of polling booths if the University of Sydney NTEU Branch takes industrial action and the Branch Committee makes that request to the EO. This clause enables the Branch to make a similar request regarding nearby university actions if they so please. This would enable a Sydney University solidarity contingent of students and staff to attend nearby industrial actions without campaigners fearing that there would be a negative effect on their electoral chances.

The request for such a clause was issued to the President and the Electoral Officer by Nick Riemer, NTEU Sydney Branch President. He said:

“It's fantastic to see the support from the SRC and EAG for the ongoing industrial campaign. I'm getting in touch on the request of one of our members following the date clash between the recent elections and the UTS strike. We'd like to ask you to consider continuing and extending your policy of support for the branch's industrial actions by closing, with no loss of pay for staff, not just offices but the SRC elections when our branch is striking or acting in solidarity with the strikes of nearby universities. Electoral workers are under a separate agreement but covered by the same branch of the NTEU and current practices force them to work through a variety of branch actions. I understand totally that this is a big ask, and that it was too difficult to work around at the last minute for these elections, but it's worth considering for the future. So if you wouldn't mind passing this on to Lia, whose address I don't have, that'd be fantastic.”

AMENDMENT 4

64(a) The expenditure limit for the ballot for the Representatives is:

- (i) where a ticket contains three or fewer candidates – \$100 per candidate; or
- (ii) where a ticket contains four or more candidates – \$400 for the entire ticket.

AMEND TO

64(a) The expenditure limit for a ticket, including a lone candidate, in the ballot for the Representatives is \$400.

RATIONALE

The current system incentivises running four or five candidates on tickets in order to ensure that the budget for a ticket or a brand is maximised. While there exist other reasons to run surplus candidates, this incentive structure creates unnecessary work for campaign managers for large brands in recruiting candidates simply to inflate their campaign budgets. The same problem is lesser for a smaller campaign, so the current clause is a nuisance primarily for the larger brands.

It is a reasonable expectation that simply setting a per-ticket budget will diminish the number of down-ticket candidates on less significant tickets within large brands. Since a large proportion of the count length and complexity is due to the number of candidates on the ballot paper – many of which are unviable paper candidates – this will help speed up the count and save the SRC money.

In addition, this will make communicating budget compliance to campaign managers simpler.

AMENDMENT 5

(f) However, for the purpose of calculating a brand's expenditure limit under subsection (e), a brand is deemed to contain:

(i) if the brand actually contains 6 or more tickets contesting the ballot for the Representatives – 5 tickets contesting the ballot for the Representatives; and

(ii) if the brand actually contains 4 or more tickets contesting the ballot for NUS Delegates – 3 tickets contesting the ballot for NUS Delegates.

AMEND TO

(f) A brand's expenditure limit may not exceed \$2100 if it does not contain a Presidential candidate and \$2850 if it does contain a Presidential candidate.

RATIONALE

The current effective budget limit for a ticket with five or more Council tickets and an NUS ticket is \$2100, and \$2850 if it includes a Presidential candidate. Theoretically a brand can achieve a budget of \$2300 if it includes three or NUS tickets and five or more Council tickets (plus \$750 if it throws a President into the mix). In practice, surplus NUS tickets within the same brand are exceedingly rare.

Under this amendment, Council-only campaigns have a modest increase to their potential budgets from \$2000 to \$2100 – if they run six or more tickets – since the rule does not distinguish between Council and NUS. Adopting this amendment will simplify matters.

For context, clause (e), preceding this clause, reads:

e) A brand must, in total, spend no more than the aggregate of the expenditure limits applying to each of the candidates and tickets actually contained by that brand, subject to subsection (f).

Honi Soit tickets are unaffected by this amendment because their limit is set by rule at \$1500.

Note that only one brand can include a Presidential candidate, so multiple brands cannot take advantage of the Presidential funding, even if they also endorse that candidate.