

Stand. Vote. Lead.

SU Elections.

Running an Effective Campaign



Running an effective campaign

1. Introduction

Congratulations, you've made the first step towards being a Sabbatical Officer! As you go through this guide, we hope that you'll realise that running in the SU elections can actually be a genuinely fun and exciting thing to do, and isn't actually as daunting as you might think!

Each year during elections, we see candidates come up with some amazing ideas of how to campaign and communicate with students. This guide is based on advice from former candidates and Officers, and will give you some great tips on how to build the most effective campaign possible.

It's important to point out that you don't need to do absolutely everything in this guide to win (although the more you do will obviously help), and there are obviously things not included because well, we haven't thought of them yet. It's also important to point out that money is not the most important thing in an election. Each year students with small budgets are successful because they focus on the most effective methods – namely being creative and going out and talking to as many students as possible. You should also remember that all candidates will receive this guide, so thinking outside the box is key! Election campaigns are great fun, and you'll meet people you would never normally come into contact with – so make sure you enjoy it, and good luck.

2. Planning Your Campaign

How Does the Process Work?

One of the key things you'll need to understand is the process by which the elections run. This will include key dates and an online form you'll need to complete to officially take part. All of this is outlined in the Candidate Guide that is given to all students running, and if you are ever in any doubt you should contact the Deputy Returning Officer for more information. Remember, if you're unsure – ask!

Why Are You Standing?

The first thing you should do is to set aside a few hours to think about why you want to run, what you would do for students and how you plan on conveying that message. These ideas, what you want to change, should then be fleshed out into your manifesto.

Your next step should be to contact a couple of close friends to run your ideas by them, and to try and develop a clear message and brand for your campaign. In the early planning stages, try to keep these meetings to just a few people as you don't want to over complicate your ideas.

Who Are You Representing?

Most importantly you should consider the students you hope to represent – after all this is why you are running for election. Remember, people's experiences at University can vary because of social, cultural and other differences. So think about issues that will be common to everyone regardless of their background. Be aware that your primary stake holders may change depending on the position you're running for.

A good starting point is the one thing you have in common: you are all at university to get a degree and further your education. You can then start thinking about a broader range of issues that affect different people – running ideas past specific groups if you're unsure about something. A great way of doing this is to go along to student groups meetings, and ask them directly about what they'd like to change.

What Are Your Key Policies?

Having thought about the different types of students you will be representing, and the issues that affect them most, you should try and shape these into your key policies for your campaign. These policies should be what you put on your posters, what you put on your leaflets and will form talking points when you're out on campus talking to students.

A good number to aim for is four or five that you think are a) the most important, and b) most appealing to students. The more original or creative these are, the more you'll set yourself apart from the other candidates, and therefore more recognisable your campaign will be. You need to tread the line between populism (what students want) and what is achievable in a year.

Remember, you can have a full manifesto online where you can develop these ideas further, so try and keep them short and snappy for the promotion material.

Finally, if you're in doubt about whether you are able to campaign on something, ask yourself two questions:

- i. Does it affect the students I'm running to represent?
- ii. Have I got an idea how to solve or improve it?

3. Your Campaign Message

A key element to any successful campaign is the publicity behind it – how you tell students about your ideas and persuade them to vote for you.

Builder or Bruiser?

You'll also need to think about what kind of campaigner you are, and by extension, what sort of Sabb or trustee you'd be. Are you coming in to build on the works of others? Or perhaps you're more interested in a complete shake up, rustle some feathers, and change the whole system. It may be worth weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of these two types. The first one is great for getting structured plans in place- you have a foundation to work from, and you can build from there. It's also good for keeping things civil. You can use this to come across as someone willing to work *with* the college and the SU rather than against them. This type does have its shortcomings however. You can fall into the trap of losing the fire somewhat. As a new member of the SU, you'll need new, exciting ideas as well as revitalising old ones.

The second type is all about change. It's about seeing a problem, and wanting to overhaul the system. Their methods are often full of passion and drive, however this can sometimes be their downfall. Consider that if elected you will still have to work with the people you may have been berating during your campaign, and there may be reasons why some things are not actionable. Be wary of yourself in turn becoming the target for a similar campaigner next year. It's obvious then that neither of these extremes are what you should be going for. You'll need to stand out, but don't go too Les Mis on the whole revolutionary scene.

Campaign Theme

Many students choose a campaign theme that is linked to their name or something that they think will appeal to students. Students' union elections over the past few years have seen everything from Harry Potter themed election campaigns, to funny puns involving people's names, to more serious themes based around a specific policy or idea.

Campaign Colour

This sounds like a simple decision, but you want to choose something that will really stand out and draw people's attention to your campaign. In the past, people have picked colours that link with their name, campaign ideas and items of clothing they already own. Try and make sure your colours don't match any other candidates' colours either, otherwise it might become a bit confusing for voters.

Campaign Slogan(s)

Many students decide that they want to have a slogan that students can remember them by. Think about slogans used by political parties and political figures, such as Obama's 2008 'yes we can'. This was effective as it made a clear link to what people wanted, and was simple enough to be repeated time and again.

Another popular choice is to link your slogan to your name, which will help with recognition when students vote. If you think hard enough, almost any name can be made into a slogan. Past examples include:

- Nayab Cheema: Time for Cheema
- Jack Kilker: Join the Jack Pack
- Brianna Middleton MacPherson: Backing Bri

Translated Literature

Universities are becoming increasingly international in their student make up. These means a greater proportion of voters will have a first language other than English. An option you might therefore consider is having your publicity translated to ensure you message reaches these students effectively.

4. Your Campaign Publicity

Posters

The first thing you should think about is the design – make it eye catching and distinct. Look at ideas from famous advertising campaigns, magazines and television for some inspiration.

During the campaign weeks there will be posters all around campus, and because of this it's very easy for students to miss them (it's called poster blindness). Try and make yours stand out – through comedy, colour, shape or size. Your posters should have your name, a photo, your key policies, details of how to vote, and any slogans you're using on them.

You need to think about where you put your posters up to have the maximum impact on students. Please ask permission in managed areas of campus such as Libraries and academic departments, halls and bus stops are a good place to start. However, try and keep to the notice boards and if someone asks you to move or take posters down then please cooperate with them. It's also important to be considerate to other candidates, so try not to hog all the space in high profile places. If in doubt about areas to put posters please ask someone before you do.

The SU will also be running a Craftivism workshop, where we'll be providing a limited amount of supplies for you to use as you see fit.

Pasted Cardboard Banners

These can be very effective for placing outside and attaching to railings and lamp posts. All you need to make them is some wall paper paste, large pieces of cardboard, paint/posters and string or cable ties. If you want to make them waterproof, you may also want to buy sticky backed plastic.

How to make a banner

1. Collect lots of big cardboard boxes (check recycle bins and large supermarkets)
2. Flatten the box and cover it in backing paper using paper mache (use recycled paper if it's only been used on one side)
3. Stencil and paint your design, or stick your posters onto the cardboard
4. Make holes in the cardboard to allow them to be attached to things later
5. Leave to dry for 24 hours in a warm and dry place but do not stack as they will stick together
6. Once they are dry, put them up round campus

It's easiest to make them if you have a production line of friends helping, so you can make lots of them quickly.

PVC Banners

Using big PVC banners on campus can be a real talking point for students and can draw attention to you at focal points where students are likely to vote, such as at halls or outside the libraries. Try and get these up early to ensure you get a prime spot on campus (and make sure you ask permission to avoid them getting taken down).

Leaflets

Like your posters these should stand out and look appealing to students. Put the same information about voting, as well as your contact information on them. If you're using double sided leaflets, use one side for an eye catching design and the second for more detail about your policies.

Stickers

They can be really effective when out campaigning whilst speaking to students you can get them to wear stickers if they support you. Keep them as simple as possible, with something as basic as "I'm voting for...", and shop around to make sure you get the best value for money, or you can try making them yourself. This type of activity gives a campaign momentum, raising the profile of your ideas and the election in general. Please note that you are **not** allowed to place stickers on any part of campus, give them to people to wear. Trust us, they're a nightmare to clear off when the week is over.

T-shirts

T-shirts are an excellent way of having your supporters promote your campaign even when they are not actually out campaigning, and they will make your campaign easily identifiable. A cheap way to do this is to buy plain t-shirts and iron on transfer paper.

Video

Making a video can be a great way of interacting with students who don't go onto campus very often or who wouldn't read a leaflet. You can make your video serious with you talking about your policies, or you can make a spoof video that you think will appeal to students and

maybe go viral. Previously, students have chosen to act out scenes from films, sing songs or change the words of rap songs to make them relevant to their campaign. Upload them to Youtube or Vimeo and share as much as possible (a simple search on either of these will give you some good examples from past years too, remember our very own viral star 'Jason Michalski' who rewrote and recorded a version of Macklemore).

Facebook

Setting up a Facebook group or page can be an excellent way to get your supporters to show their support for you, and to help raise the profile of your campaign online. You can publish your full manifesto, post updates on what you are doing and encourage people to vote for you. Don't overdo it though - as a general rule, try and limit yourself to one Facebook update per day reminding people to vote for you. Sharing photos is a great way to spread the word too.

Using a Facebook ad can be effective as it is targeted publicity. You can change the settings to only advertise your Facebook group or page to current students at your University.

Twitter

Using Twitter is also a very good way of communicating with potential voters, especially if you use the relevant hash tags when tweeting about the elections. Again, photos are a great way of engaging students.

Website

Having a website can be a useful as it's somewhere you can direct students to that is specifically about your campaign. It's relatively easy to purchase a domain name specific to your campaign, and then have someone host the site. If you are using a blog as the template for your website you will also easily be able to see the traffic your website has each day.

Email Address

It is advisable to set up an email address specifically for the election that students are able to contact you on. This way you can keep your personal accounts separate, and can easily contact those voters with questions or queries. It is obviously not essential, but it can be a nice way of allowing students to be in touch with you throughout the campaign.

Songs

In the past, some candidates have also looked to music to help support their campaign – ranging from re writing song lyrics of popular tunes, to original composed pieces. It's a great way of injecting a bit of fun, and drawing attention to your supporters.

5. How to Campaign

Campaign Team

One of the most important elements of any campaign's success is to have a good group of campaigners who will help you distribute fliers, put up posters and generally spread the word about your campaign.

If you can, try and hold a training session where you familiarise them with your policies, tell them how you would like them to campaign, and go through the rules that all candidates and campaigners must abide by. This is also a great opportunity to talk about some of the benefits they'll get from participating, particularly related to employability after graduation. The best way of ensuring students vote for you is to talk to them, not just hand them a flyer, so really stress this as much as possible.

Good people to ask to campaign for you are friends from your halls or accommodation, friends from your course or society or even friends from other universities or back home. Take some time in putting together some kind of rota if possible, so you know how much to expect from friends in terms of time commitment. Remember though, these people are doing you a huge favour and will have other time commitments, so don't take it personally if they can't give as much time as you'd like. It's also worth setting aside some of your campaign budget for food and drink – a little gesture like this goes a long way.

Everyone gets a bit stressed out during elections, so if you feel that this is happening to you, tell your campaign team that you're going to campaign elsewhere and take half an hour to reenergise and refocus. Never let yourself get to the stage where you are grumpy with voters or your campaign team, it's completely normal, just have a cup of tea and calm down. You should also make sure that you're looking out for the wellbeing of your campaign team. Remember, they're volunteering their time and energy for free, so don't push them too hard, and definitely don't ask them to miss contact hours to campaign. They're humans too!

Finally, make sure you use your team effectively. Have regular meetings keeping people updated on what's happened, and spread people out around campus rather than just outside main buildings. It's also worth stressing the importance of them not grouping together and simply talking to each other – you want them to be engaging with students who have yet to be persuaded to vote for you yet.

Campaign manager

Appointing a close friend to act as a campaign 'manager' is an extremely useful technique to reduce some of the pressure during the election, and will allow you to focus on talking to as many students as possible. Choose a good organiser, people person, and someone who's committed to helping you win. Make sure you thank them at the end of the process too.

Election week timetable

Get one of these written up, prior to the start of elections, for you and your campaign team. This gives everyone an idea of what they should be doing and ensures that the key places, like ballot boxes, are covered.

Talking to Students

When talking to students, try and be brief and to the point - but make sure you tell them something they will remember. A good icebreaker is to introduce yourself, and then ask them a couple of questions before you start to talk about yourself and your ideas. Focus on the changes you are proposing that are relevant to them – remember elections are about the voters.

Lecture Shout Outs

Doing lecture shout outs are an extremely important part of campaigning. For a minute or two you have access to up to 400 students, all in one place, ready to listen to you. Like quite a lot of aspects of running an election campaign, it can seem very daunting to walk into a huge lecture theatre of unfamiliar faces, so start practising on your own lectures where you'll know some of the students there. Try and arrive at least 15 minutes before the start in order to ask permission from the lecturer, and try and keep your pitch down to a minute or less – audience participation is great when it works, but can be tricky at 9am. Remember every second over that minute you use is a second that eats into their education, and their lecture. Not a great look for a potential future Sabb.

Using Technology

Technology now means that students can use their phones, computers and iPads/tablets to vote in the elections. If you use this means you get people to vote then it is very important

that you do not pressure students into voting there and then, and if they do, let them do this independently without standing over them and telling them who to vote for.

Using Sweets

Many candidates choose to give out sweets during election time to lure students into talking to them. They can also be a nice way of starting a conversation with a potential voter; however, they are not essential and are, ultimately, an added expense.

Flash mob

In the past, some candidates have chosen to do a flash mob on campus to attract attention during a busy period of voting. There has been singing, dancing and acting, all of which went down very well with students and drew attention to the respective candidates

Campaign Launch Party

Having a launch party on the first night of voting can often be a very good idea. Invite your friends, their friends and get people along to celebrate the launch of your campaign. Lots of bars have space for small private functions that is free to hire and it will help your campaign gain momentum.

6. Where to Campaign

Campaigning In Halls of Residences

Halls are a fantastic place to campaign in the evenings once campus has gone quiet and students have left for the day. Be mindful that these are students' homes though, and make sure you are polite and ask permission if you're poster in kitchens etc.

Campaigning at the Bus Queues

Bus queues are a perfect place for you to catch students with five minutes free to talk. You will often find hundreds of students waiting around and they will usually be more than willing to talk for a couple of minutes. Fliers are also great as they'll have time to read them during their journey.

Campaigning at Student Events

In the run up to the election many candidates will choose to attend student events to try and gain support from the society and its members. Societies don't usually mind this, however, you should speak to the President of the society prior to going along to check if it is ok to attend in this capacity.

Campaigning during Nights Out

Campaigning during nights out can be effective at raising the profile of your campaign, especially if you get your campaign team dressed up to attract attention. Be careful not to annoy students who may be taking a break from their studies though, and remember too many late nights will negatively affect your capacity to campaign during the day.

What You'll Need

| | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Fliers | Sweets | Pasting table for a |
| Posters | T-Shirts | makeshift ballot station – |
| Blu Tac | Wallpaper paste | easily available from DIY |
| Card | Scissors | stores |
| Paint | Hard copies of extended | Spray paint |
| Large sheets for banners | manifesto | Stickers |

7. Glossary of Key Terms

Accountability – put most simply, this means making sure the organisation is doing its job properly. This includes things like blogs, reports and making sure election manifestos are available for students to see all year round.

Ballot Station – this is a point where students can vote.

Campaigning – this is what you need to do in order to persuade students to vote for you. As you will have seen in the guide, there are lots of different ways to do this. Be creative!

Candidate – someone who puts themselves forward to run in the elections.

Democracy – this just means we're run by our members. Elections are one part of this.

Elections – the process by which students choose their elected officers.

Electorate – the name for the group eligible to vote in an election.

Hustings – also called candidate question time, this event offers all candidates the chance to speak to an audience of students on a range of topics.

Lobby – this is the process of using skills and persuasion to convince a group or organisation, such as the University, to change or introduce something.

Manifesto – this is the document that each candidate produces, to be published online, for students to read to help them decide who they want to vote for.

Nomination – you must submit a nomination in order to be a registered candidate in the elections.

Policies – a set of ideas that reflect your opinions and beliefs, which you use to try and persuade people to vote for you.

Publicity – this is what you will use to publicise your campaign to students. From leaflets to tweeting, there are many mediums you can use to create publicity.

Returning Officer – the Returning Officer is the person who has the final say over election disputes and problems with the election process. They also return the election on results night, so they are the first person to receive and confirm the winners.

Slogan – something you might use to brand your campaign, such as Vote John Smith #1, Choose Cheryl, or Select Susan.

So Elections – this is the name and branding for all the elections that we hold. It's also the hashtag for twitter - #SoElections

STV – stands for Single Transferrable Vote, which is the way votes are counted to determine the winner in the elections. Effectively it means everyone is asked to rank the candidates in order of how much they support them, rather simply choose one individual. More information on this is available online.

Suspending Studies – this is something that you are entitled to do if you get elected as a Sabbatical Officer during your time at University. You can then return to University, as normal, once you have finished your year in office.

Voting Period – this is the period of time that the elections run for and students are eligible to vote; they cannot vote outside of this time.

8. Key Dos and Don'ts

DO

- ✓ Do go out and talk to students
- ✓ Do enjoy it as much as possible
- ✓ Do be aware that students get very fed up of the constant hassle of electioneering very quickly; think of different and exciting ways to campaign
- ✓ Do remember to eat and remember to take regular breaks – the same should go for your campaigners
- ✓ Do be able to sum up why a person should vote for you in 30 seconds
- ✓ Do be creative and make things
- ✓ Do make a fun and entertaining video
- ✓ Do use social media to promote your campaign
- ✓ Do make sure you do lots of lecture shout outs
- ✓ Do plan early
- ✓ Do have a clear message
- ✓ Do keep your best campaign ideas secret until you actually start using them
- ✓ Do take lots of campaign photos by which to remember the campaign you've run.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't decide not to run because you are afraid you won't get elected. In the words of the famous American baseball player Babe Ruth 'don't let the fear of striking out keep you from playing the game'
- ✗ Don't spend too much money, especially not on sweets
- ✗ Don't go overboard with your publicity; a few posters in each building are more than enough
- ✗ Don't overwork yourself and your campaign team
- ✗ Don't be put off if one student is disinterested or rude to you, the majority will be interested

- × Don't be unfair to other candidates by taking their posters down or negatively campaigning
- × Don't promise things that you can't achieve
- × Don't litter your campus – remember the way candidates conduct themselves affects the perception of the SU and students around campus

9. Conclusion

At this point, you should have all the information you need to start campaigning! It may seem pretty terrifying now, but the experience is one that is truly unique and not to be missed. What you're doing is incredibly brave, and the Union simply could not operate if not for individuals like you. So from all of us at the SU, good luck, and see you on the campaign trail!

If you have any questions or would like to speak to the Student Voice team then please feel free to contact us at Voice@su.rhul.ac.uk