

Oxford University Student Union

Company no. 07314850 Charity no. 1140687

REFERENDUM RULES 2023

(Directions)

Following a resolution of Student Council, a referendum has been called on the SU’s continued affiliation with the *National Union of Students (United Kingdom)*, commonly known as the NUS.

These rules exist to ensure that the referendum environment is positive, fair, and accessible. The referendum is governed by these Rules (formally known as “Directions”), as well as the Regulations (accessible [here](#)). Your attention is drawn in particular to Regulation 2.1, which creates a general duty to act to ensure that the referendum is fairly and properly conducted.

Contact Information

Returning Officer returningofficer@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk

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Part A: General

1 • Principles

These principles are not directly enforceable but should guide the interpretation of the Regulations and Directions.

1. **Be respectful:** Treat all students, campaigners, and staff with respect.
2. **Play fair:** Do not seek an unfair advantage.
3. **Ask:** If in doubt, ask the Returning Officer first.

2 • Timeline

1. **Wednesday 15th February (w5):** proposed Official Campaign statements must be sent to the Returning Officer. Election of the Campaign Leaders.
2. **Week 6 (TBC):** Open Meeting(s) or hustings for the Official Campaigns
3. **Monday 27th February 08:00 – Wednesday 1st March 18:00 (w7):** Polling period
4. **Wednesday 1st March 19:30 (w7):** Result Announced

3 • Question

There will be only one question, which shall read “Oxford SU is currently affiliated to the National Union of Students (United Kingdom). Should it continue to be affiliated: yes or no?”.

Every Student Member may vote once, choosing either ‘Yes’, ‘No’ or ‘Abstain’.

The result will be decided by a simple majority once abstentions have been discounted.

Part B: Official Campaigns

This section concerns the Official Campaigns and their selection.

4 • Campaigns

There shall be two Official Campaigns, one for the ‘Yes’ vote and one for the ‘No’ vote, led by a Campaign Leader who will set out the Campaign’s position and key points. Each Campaign may spend up to £100, £50 of which shall be reimbursed by the SU, and will be allowed to set out their position in a statement published to all Student Members.

To apply to be an Official Campaign Leader, submit to the Returning Officer via [this form](#)

- The proposed name of the Campaign
- A draft Campaign Statement, outlining the key points you intend to make in the campaign. The required format is set out below.
- A declaration that you have read and agree to abide by these rules, and any subsequent directions issued by the Returning Officer.

The Campaign Leader shall be elected from those applying as above at a meeting open to all Student Members in fourth week. The Returning Officer reserves the right to veto any candidate whose statement or campaign plans would likely result in the contravention of these rules.

5 • Statements

Campaign Leaders must submit a statement of under 500 words outlining the position and main points of the Campaign. The statement will be published on the SU's website.

The statement must be submitted in plain text. Campaign Leaders may submit, in addition, formatted statement(s) of a format specified by the Returning Officer.

The Returning Officer may at any time reject or require changes to be made to the statements if they fail to comply with this rule or contain false, misleading, unlawful, or offensive material.

Part C: Campaigning

This section details rules of campaigning which bind all Student Members.

6 • Campaigning

Campaigning is any activity designed to persuade student members to vote a certain way in the referendum.

Attempting to persuade members to vote or providing information about the referendum will not be considered campaigning if a good faith effort is made not to show favour or bias toward a particular position.

7 • Conduct

All Student Members must comply with the University's Statute XI (on Student Conduct) and its [Code of Practice on Meetings and Events](#).

In particular, intolerant, discriminatory or hate speech regarding any racial or religious minority is strictly forbidden. Student Members should report to the appropriate authorities any such speech.

Student Members must consider the impact of campaigning on those around them, especially when campaigning about what may be difficult or sensitive issues for some.

8 • Negative Campaigning

Campaigners should not criticise individuals involved in campaigning or make critical personal or organisational comments about the other campaign as a whole.

This direction shall not be interpreted to limit the right to free expression of any individual or prevent Official Campaigns from expressing legitimate concern about malpractice by the other campaign.

9 • Campaign Expenses

Each Official Campaign must not spend more than £100. They must submit a summary of expenditure and invoices to the Returning Officer within 30 minutes of the close of voting.

The SU will reimburse Official Campaign expenditure up to a maximum of £50.

10 • Treating

Student Members (including Campaign Leaders) must not engage in treating, which means offering material incentives (e.g., snacks) to any person with a view to encouraging them to vote a certain way or not to vote in the referendum.

11 • Mailing Lists

A mailing list is any list of email addresses, physical addresses or phone numbers, or a social media group created for disseminating information to members of a particular organisation (e.g., a Common Room's Facebook group).

Campaigns may only use mailing lists which were created solely for the purpose of their campaign. Any mailing lists created for the purpose of campaigning must be opt-in and deleted immediately after the election.

Organisations which have made an endorsement compliant with Direction 13 below may use pre-existing mailing lists to campaign.

12 • Social Media

Campaigns are allowed to campaign on social media.

13 • Endorsements

Campaigns may seek the endorsement of individual Student Members but must not seek or claim the endorsement of unelected Oxford SU employees, Student Council or any of its committees, or any Oxford SU Schemes or Projects.

Campaigns may seek endorsements from Oxford SU Campaigns and non-Oxford SU organisations (e.g., clubs and societies).

Oxford SU Campaigns may only endorse a campaign following a democratic vote in which all Full Members of the Campaign can participate, and in which there is an option to make no endorsement. Such a vote may take place either at an Open Meeting, or electronically if the Returning Officer is satisfied all, and only, SU Campaign members were able to vote.

Non-Oxford SU organisations may only to endorse a campaign after a democratic vote in accordance with the rules of that organisation (e.g., by a committee vote or a poll of all members).

14 • Campaign Team Members

Anyone who campaigns for an Official Campaign shall be presumed to be a Campaign Team Member of the relevant Campaign, unless the Campaign Leader shows that on gaining knowledge of the actions of that person, they have made reasonable efforts to discourage the campaigning.

Official Campaigns shall be held responsible for the conduct of their Team Members.

Part D: Complaints

This section details the procedure and time limits for formal complaints.

15 • Complaints

The Returning Officer strives to address concerns about misconduct informally where reasonable. This does not affect your right to submit a formal complaint.

16 • Format

All formal complaints must be made by sending an email to the Returning Officer, with the subject 'Formal Complaint'. A complaint should state clearly what misconduct is alleged, giving as many details as possible, but need not explicitly state which (if any) rules have been broken.

The Returning Officer is happy to advise members on submitting a formal complaint.

17 • Time Limit

All formal complaints must be submitted before the end of voting, except that those relating to the counting of the votes must be submitted within 24 hours of the results being published.

Part E: The NUS

This section details rules which the Returning Officer expects the NUS to adhere to.

18 • Campaigning

The NUS (NUS UK or NUS Charity) is encouraged to follow the rules binding Student Members, including rules on the use of mailing lists. All staff members or officers of the NUS are encouraged to consult the Returning Officer on campaigning activities they undertake in Oxford or in relation to this referendum.

The Returning Officer and the External Appeals Officer may hold Official Campaigns accountable for campaigning actions undertaken by the NUS or its officers.

19 • Notification

The President shall inform the NUS in writing of the outcome of this referendum within one month of the result being announced unless the result is declared, or otherwise deemed, null and void.

Part F: Addendum

This section details formal matters relating to the Bye-Laws and Regulations.

20 • Quorum

The Returning Officer shall inform Student Members promptly if it becomes apparent a quoracy requirement is to be applied to this referendum.

21 • Binding

Subject to the Board's responsibility for the legal and financial operation of the SU, this referendum shall be binding on the SU.

22 • Validity

These Directions have been issued under Regulation 6.4 by the Returning Officer with the President's agreement. The Returning Officer may amend, remove or supplement these directions subject to the Regulations. In the consideration of complaints, no person shall be found guilty of breaking Directions which were not in effect at the time of their action.

Issued 7th February 2023 by
Joe Bell, Returning Officer, and approved by
Michael-Akolade Ayodeji, President