

Dear all,

What a palaver! I've written this statement to try and give you a picture of how my campaign unwittingly breached the rules and got me disqualified. I'm not going to sling mud at my competitors, but I do hope all sides reflect on what was a stressful and emotionally-heightened time it was, and how every campaign breached the rules and made mistakes. I hope that you don't take this letter as a series of excuses, but rather as a snapshot of a time before the benefit of hindsight.

#### WHAT HAPPENED?

My campaign used iPads and laptops to facilitate mobile voting and enable a larger turnout. This strategy was based on the experience of a member of my campaign team at their former University where it was well within the rules. At the time, we saw nothing wrong with what we were doing and thought it was nothing out of the ordinary: in fact, I believed other candidates were doing exactly the same thing. Unfortunately, the Electoral Committee received a complaint from [REDACTED] that this strategy was in breach of the Cambridge University Student Union (CUSU) Standing Orders that govern the Graduate Union (GU) elections, specifically Article G.10.viii which states:

“No candidate or member of their campaign team, or any other person attempting to influence a voter may approach within three metres of the polling station except when they themselves are voting”.

On Friday (9<sup>th</sup>) afternoon, the Election Committee asked me in at 2:30pm to discuss the use of iPads in my campaign, and it was then that they informed me of their interpretation of iPads as “mobile polling stations” and my campaign as under investigation for breaching Article G.10.viii (which we might call the “three-metre rule”). Once informed I did not campaign for the rest of the day as I was so shocked at being considered in violation of the rules. My campaign estimates that 88 votes were made on devices provided by myself or my campaigners whilst we were within a three-metre vicinity of the voter (Appendix A),

#### WHY DID I CHOOSE THE IPAD STRATEGY?

Believe me, with hindsight I wish I hadn't. But at the time I was particularly excited about this strategy as it mirrored the commitment in my manifesto to better outreach, facilitating student engagement with the democratic process in a way that was fun and convenient (Figure 1, Appendix B). My approach was always cheerful and respectful, many people wanted to talk and ask me questions, some said they wanted to vote (which I could facilitate) and some said they'd prefer to vote later, which I recognised! My intention was never to coerce people into voting on the spot but rather provide them with the opportunity to do so if they wished. My aim was to improve the democratic mandate of the next GU president by facilitating a higher turnout.

There is a great deal of evidence of my desire to increase the democratic mandate of the GU: on Facebook, where I publicly posted “Don't miss your chance to be a part of this – whoever wins they need that mandate!” (Figure 2, Appendix B), in the candidates' hustings: “[Cotton] pointed out that only 6% of graduates voted in last year's election to

underline the need for increased engagement” (Varsity 2018),<sup>1</sup> and in the advice I gave to all my campaigners to use this 6% turnout statistic to get out the vote (Figure 3, Appendix B). It was this desire that motivated the use of iPads and laptops to facilitate voting in my campaign.

## MY STATEMENTS

**I deeply regret the current state of affairs and would like to apologise for the stress and labour caused on all sides.** I wish to reiterate my commitment to the spirit of free and fair and democratic elections, and note my openness and compliance with the Elections Committee throughout this election and investigation; as well as identify the shared aim of finding a constructive solution that will strengthen the legitimacy of the Graduate Union now and into the future.

**My greatest hope is that this situation can be used to improve CUSU-GU policy on elections, specifically through the extensive development of campaign guidelines,** to reduce the burden on the Elections Committee next year to provide ad-hoc rulings and to fully inform the candidates, campaigns and colleges. Drawing from policies on mobile voting in other Universities could be useful in this regard (Appendix C).

**I am considering appealing my disqualification,** pending the outcome of the election (Appendix D).

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.varsity.co.uk/news/15052>

## APPENDIX A

The vast majority of my campaign was through friendship networks, pidgeon-holing, and word of mouth, with people voting elsewhere. **According to our best estimates, the number of votes cast within three metres of a candidate or campaigner on a device provided by that candidate or campaigner was around 88.** In saying this, I am not accepting the Election Committee's interpretation of a "polling station" in Article G.10.viii that my disqualification is based on, although I would like to identify my compliance with that interpretation once it was made known to me (on Friday 9th March at 2:30pm), which shows my commitment to every rule that I am aware of, and that this alleged rule breach was unintentional.

FIG 1: ESTIMATED EXTENT OF VOTING CONDUCTED WITHIN THREE-METRES OF MYSELF OR ONE OF MY CAMPAIGNERS

<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Device</i>	<i>Votes*</i>
Christs	Tue 6th	7:30-8:15pm	iPad 1	7
Clare Hall	Tue 6th	8:30-10pm	iPad 1	2
Wolfson	Wed 7th	12:30-2pm	iPad 1	15
Wolfson	Wed 7th	7:30-8pm	iPad 1	12
St Edmunds	Wed 7th	9-10pm	iPad 1	4
Wolfson	Wed 7th	12:30-2pm	iPad 1	9
Newnham	Wed 7th	6-8pm	Laptop	8
Wolfson	Wed 7th	7-9pm	iPad 2	3
Lucy Cavendish	Thur 8th	7:05-7:30pm	iPad 1	9
Murray Edwards	Fri 9th	12-1pm	Laptop	3
Wolfson	Fri 9th	12:14-2pm	Laptop	0
Grad Cafe	Fri 9th	12:30-2:15pm	iPad 1	12
Physics	Fri 9th	1-2pm	iPad 2	4
				<i>88</i>

\*Total number of estimated votes cast within three metres of a candidate or campaigner on a device provided by that candidate or campaigner. If the IT facilities exist, these devices can be provided so that the number of votes can be traced by IP address, which would corroborate these estimates.

## APPENDIX B

The evidence presented here is to substantiate my rationale for using iPads to make voting “fun and convenient” (Fig 1), increase voter turnout (Fig 2), and improve the mandate of “whoever wins” (Fig 3). I believed that the practical invisibility of the GU to the majority of the graduate membership necessitated a proactive and engaging approach, which was encouraged in the *Lent Elections – Candidates Pack* that advised us on campaigning, and that using iPads was in line with this.

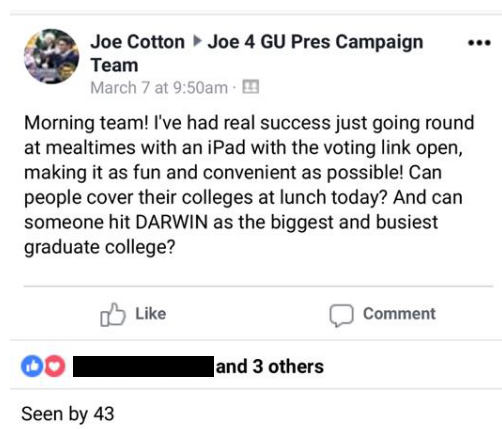
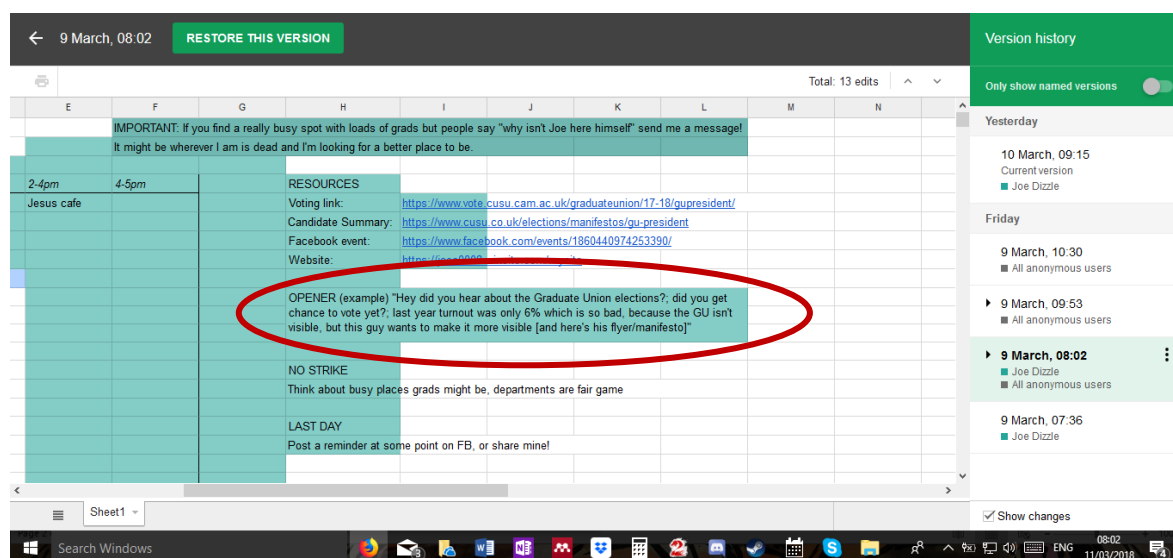


FIGURE 1: *Make voting fun and convenient*

“Morning team! I’ve had read success just going round at mealtimes with an iPad with the voting link open, making it as fun and convenient as possible! Can people cover their colleges at lunch today? And can someone hit DARWIN as the biggest and busiest graduate college?”

Wed 7<sup>th</sup> March 2018, 09:50.

FIGURE 2: Advice to Campaign Team, *Emphasise the need to increase turnout*



OPENER (example): “Hey did you hear about the Graduate Union elections?; Did you get chance to vote yet?; Last year turnout was only 6% which is so bad, but it’s because the GU isn’t visible, but this guy wants to make it more visible [and here’s his flyer/manifesto]”

Fri 9<sup>th</sup> March, 08:02

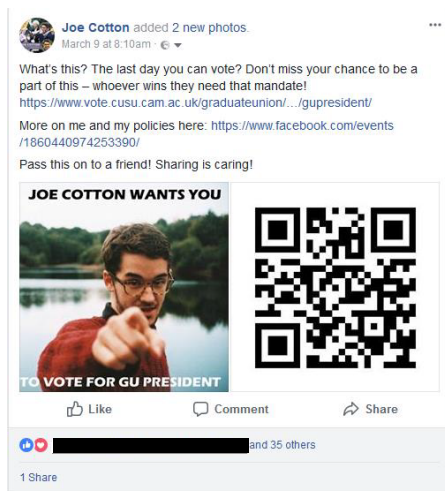


FIGURE 3: *Give the winner a strong mandate*

“What’s this? The last day you can vote? Don’t miss your chance to be a part of this – whoever wins they need that mandate!”

Fri 9<sup>th</sup> March, 08:10

## APPENDIX C

In this section I present some informative examples of relevant policy from other Students’ Unions, which CUSU and the GU could draw upon for future election cycles to ensure candidates do not unwittingly break the rules and end up disqualified. Broadly speaking there are different options, and of course it should be up to the CUSU and GU Councils to decide:

### 1. BAN

The use of iPads and laptops in campaigns could be explicitly banned, as is the case in:

- Aston Students’ Union (2016):  
“No use of iPads, Laptops or other devices to encourage people to vote for you. Steering Committee will encourage voting in an impartial manner” (Union Officer Election, Rule 5)
- Loughborough Students’ Union (2015-16):  
“Candidates are banned from creating private ballot boxes including the use of iPads, laptops, mobile phones etc” (NUS Delegate Candidates pack, Article 4.14)
- University of Westminster Students’ Union (2018):  
“Voters may not be harassed or given direct instruction on how to vote at the point they are making their vote” (Elections Guide, Article 2)
- University of Wolverhampton Students’ Union (2016):  
“Candidates may not use electronic devices to encourage or help students to vote i.e. laptops, iPads, smart phones. For example, candidates must not approach voters with an electronic device and in order to get them to vote online. Please note: our membership management system is able to identify where multiple votes have been cast from one single device.” (UWSU,
- or Worcester Students’ Union (2016):  
“[In person, you can’t:] Stand over students when they are voting or help other students in any way to cast a vote. SU staff and volunteers will be on hand to explain the process and technology to voters and will report any activities of this nature by candidates immediately to the Elections Committee or the Deputy Returning Officer” (Code of conduct for candidates, p 2-3).

This list is not exhaustive. Other unions are in the process of deliberating bans, such as the UCL student union council which debated a motion to ban iPad voting in January this year.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. REGULATION

Rather than a ban, online ballots could feature a message at the top of the page informing students of their voting entitlements, as is the case in the Sunderland Union (SU):

Issues voting in SU Elections (Tuesday 24-02-2015 - 18:18)

Please note: you are entitled to cast your vote freely, privately and securely. This applies even if you are asked by a candidate or their campaign team to vote on their laptop/ipad etc. If you feel you have not been given the opportunity to cast your vote privately, please email [su.elections@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:su.elections@sunderland.ac.uk) with the details.<sup>3</sup>

This message should be partnered with a ruling that “all candidates must respect that every student has the right to vote confidentially and freely”,<sup>4</sup> which currently does not feature in any of CUSU or the GU’s election rules.

## 3. GUIDANCE

In any case, more thorough campaign guidelines are required for future elections, which build on the experiences and rulings of this cycle. Worcester Students’ Union’s (2015-16) list of do’s and don’ts could be a good starting place for providing information to students who have never run a large-scale election campaign before. We should aim to make candidates as confident and informed as possible on all aspects of campaigning, and be particularly mindful of the ways in which procedural barriers might intersect with different cultural identities, as two-thirds of the graduate population at Cambridge is international. [REDACTED]

## APPENDIX D

I believe that the Election Committee’s decision to disqualify me is based on the belief that the majority of the votes I received were made on iPads; and hence if it is ruled that voting in this way is unconstitutional, then disqualification is warranted. However, as shown in Appendix A, this was not the case.

**My belief is that my disqualification should only be upheld if it can reasonably be believed that the scale of allegedly unconstitutional voting made a difference to the outcome of the election.**

This is because to disqualify me on the basis of (an interpretation of) an inconsequential technicality would violate the sovereign decision of the electoral if a legal majority of votes still returned me as the preferred candidate.

*Thanks for reading, do respect that I might take a while to reply to messages at this time!*

---

<sup>2</sup> Although the motion gained a majority, it failed to pass the 75% threshold required to change the constitution: <https://cheesegratermagazine.org/2018/01/25/union-members-meeting/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sunderlandsu.co.uk/articles/issues-voting-in-su-elections>

<sup>4</sup> <http://mancunion.com/2013/03/15/49889/>