

Aston Students’ Union – Referendum Campaigning Rules

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Context and Purpose

These Referendum Campaigning Rules are designed to ensure that all referenda conducted by Aston Students’ Union (SU) are run in a fair, transparent, and democratic manner.

They are based on the principles outlined in Aston SU’s Election Rules, the democratic expectations contained within Byelaws, and best practices from Students’ Unions across the UK.

The purpose of these rules is to:

- protect the integrity of the referendum process
- uphold the voice of students
- ensure that neither side gains an unfair advantage during campaigning

1. Purpose and Principles

All referenda must be conducted in accordance with the following democratic principles:

- Fairness – campaign teams must compete on equal terms.
- Transparency – the process must be clear and accountable.
- Accessibility – all students must have equal opportunity to engage with the referendum.

- Neutrality – the Students’ Union must administer the referendum impartially.

These principles reflect the democratic standards used across UK Students’ Unions to ensure the outcome reflects genuine student opinion without undue influence.

2. Eligibility to Campaign

Only Aston University students may campaign in a referendum.

- This requirement ensures that:
- campaigns remain student-led
- external influence is prevented
- the integrity of the SU’s democratic processes is protected

Rules for NUS Campaigners:

Officers & staff from NUS UK may be on campus during the Vote Week, to campaign for Aston SU to remain affiliated with them. As campus is public realm, we cannot prohibit NUS staff from being present and talking to students about the Referendum.

NUS Staff must abide by the following rules, which have been set out to them, in addition to our general rules and guidelines for campaigners:

- NUS may not campaign inside of the SU building (including the foyer spaces and corridors)
- NUS cannot receive SU-provided campaign materials. They are advised of the material allocation for student-led campaign teams and asked to work in accordance with these.
- Any campaign team on the side of staying affiliated can consent for us to put them in contact with NUS, should they wish to work together to campaign

3. Official Campaign Teams

Aston Students’ Union will formally recognise:

- one “Yes” campaign team for the relevant referendum.
- one “No” campaign team for the relevant referendum.

Official campaign teams ensure:

- clear communication channels
- equitable access to campaign resources
- accountability for campaign activity

4. Campaign Conduct

All campaigners must conduct themselves in a respectful and responsible manner.

Campaign teams must:

- Avoid harassment, intimidation, or discrimination
- Avoid spreading misinformation or misleading statements
- Follow the behavioural expectations outlined in the Students' Union Code of Conduct and Election Rules

Campaigning activity must not disrupt teaching, university operations, or other student activities.

5. Campaign Materials

Approval of Materials

- No individual or group may produce or distribute printed campaign materials without prior approval from the Returning Officer.
- Campaign materials may only be distributed once the Returning Officer has authorised their use.

Printed Campaign Materials

The Students' Union will produce campaign materials for each official campaign team to ensure fairness.

Each team will receive:

- 25 A3 Posters (single-sided, colour) or 50 A4 Posters (single-sided, colour)
- 1000 A5 Flyers (double-sided, colour)

No additional printed campaign materials (including posters, flyers, banners, T-shirts, badges, etc.) may be produced or distributed.

Producing unauthorised materials will be considered a breach of the Referendum Rules.

The Returning Officer may amend the quantity of printed materials provided, provided that both campaign teams receive the same entitlement.

Online Campaign Materials

Official campaign teams will also be provided with:

- space on the Students' Union website
- space within the online voting system

This allows each campaign to outline their position to voters, similar to election manifestos. Additional communication opportunities may also be provided by the Students' Union during the campaign period.

There is no official campaign budget.

Individual students may wish to spend their own money, but this will not be reimbursed.

Clubs, Societies and Project Groups cannot use their funds to campaign.

6. Responsibilities of Campaign Teams

Campaign teams are responsible for ensuring their campaign activity remains respectful and lawful.

Campaign teams must ensure that their supporters do not engage in:

- Coercion
- Bribery
- Disruption to University activities
- Local rules apply across the University e.g. there will be no campaigning in the library and the quiet study space on the 7th floor of the main building.

Campaign teams are responsible for addressing inappropriate behaviour from their supporters where it occurs.

Supporters are individuals who, through action or communication, promote or assist a campaign team's position, regardless of whether they are formally registered as campaigners. This includes students advocating publicly for a campaign, informal helpers, members of endorsing Clubs or Societies, and any external persons whose actions support a campaign. Campaign teams are responsible for the conduct of their supporters

7. Referendum Statements

Each campaign team will have 300 words in which to write a statement supporting the option they are campaigning for. This statement will be used to inform students about your campaign. The deadline for submission of this statement is Wednesday 18th March 2026 at 12 noon.

Campaign teams must ensure that their referendum statements or campaign materials are:

- accurate
- respectful
- free from defamatory statements
- realistic and achievable

The Deputy Returning Officer may provide feedback if statements contain inaccuracies or breaches of the rules. Campaign teams will be given the opportunity to amend their statements before the submission deadline.

8. Participation by Clubs, Societies and Project Groups

Students' Union Clubs, Societies, and Project Groups may participate in referendum discussions.

They may:

- support a particular position
- encourage members to vote
- recommend voting either for or against the referendum question

However, participation must meet the following conditions:

- The decision must be approved by the committee of the club, society, or project group
- The decision must be formally recorded.
- This record may be requested by the Returning Officer at any stage.

Clubs, Societies, and Project Groups may communicate their position to members using internal communication methods such as:

- Email
- Social media including social media groups
- In Person Announcements

However, they must not:

- Produce physical campaign materials
- Print posters or flyers
- Use SU financial or organisational resources to campaign

9. Participation by Elected Officers (Full-Time and Voluntary)

Elected student officers may participate in the referendum as individual students.

Sabbatical Officers campaigning may do so during working hours without taking annual leave.

Officers may campaign using work/personal email accounts and work/personal social media accounts. They must inform the student voice team which campaign team they are part of prior to acting.

10. Voting Rules

Voting in referenda must be conducted in a manner that ensures:

- privacy of the ballot
- freedom from pressure or coercion
- equal access for all eligible students

No student may attempt to influence another student's vote at the point of voting.

Quoracy for the vote would be 4% of student members as per Byelaw 4 Election and Referenda at Aston Students Union

415 The quorum for a referendum will be at least 4% of members

11. Complaints and Sanctions

All rulings on the interpretation of these rules will be made by the Returning Officer (RO) or their nominated representative, typically the Deputy Returning Officer (DRO).

In making decisions, the Returning Officer will prioritise the interests of the student electorate above all others. The Returning Officer's interpretation of the rules is final during the referendum.

These referendum rules operate in addition to:

- Students' Union policies
- University regulations
- Applicable law

If a breach of the rules occurs, the Returning Officer or their nominee may apply sanctions.

Possible sanctions include, but are not limited to:

- a reminder or guidance notice
- an informal warning
- a formal warning
- a public warning
- a temporary ban on campaigning (online or in person)
- a compliance directive
- disqualification of a campaign agent or campaign team

Complaints must:

- be submitted to the Deputy Returning Officer via a form that will be made available on the Referendum webpage.
- include supporting evidence
- be submitted no later than 2 hours after voting has ended.

12. Appeals

In accordance with Aston Students' Union Byelaw, appeals relating to:

- referendum results
- decisions made by the Returning Officer
- the conduct of the referendum process
- must be submitted to the Students' Union Board of Trustees.

Appeals must be submitted within five working days of the Returning Officer's decision.

The Board of Trustees will review the appeal and make a final determination. The decision of the Board of Trustees is final.

