Vote-Counting Guideline

New student-led organisation Board election

Purpose

This Guideline explains how votes will be validated, counted and reported for the election of Student Directors. It operates with the draft Constitution and Election Rules. If there is an inconsistency, the draft Constitution prevails, and the Election Rules prevail over this Guideline.

1. Authority and responsibility

The Returning Officer is the individual appointed to conduct the election of Student Directors (draft Constitution, clause 5.4). The Returning Officer controls the count, determines questions about ballot formality and applies this Guideline consistently. The Returning Officer's decision is final on all matters affecting the eligibility of candidates, the conduct and results of the election and such other matters as may affect the conduct of elections (draft Constitution, clause 5.4(d)). The Returning Officer is not a candidate-appointed scrutineer.

2. Positions to be filled

Ballot	Vacancies	Count outcome
Student Director	5	Five candidates elected from one ballot, with the Campus Director position reserved (see section 8)

Inaugural term allocation

For the first election held after registration of the Company, the allocation of inaugural two-year and one-year terms among the elected Student Directors will be determined in accordance with the Election Rules for that election (draft Constitution, clause 5.1(e)(ii)).

3. Pre-count checks

- Confirm the electoral roll, number of voting credentials issued and number of votes received.
- Confirm that each eligible voter could submit only one vote in the Student Director ballot.
- Complete a final eligibility check for every candidate before declaring a result.
- Record any valid withdrawal or ineligibility and apply the treatment stated in section 7.
- Confirm the voting platform settings and preserve an auditable count report.

4. Formal and informal votes

The electronic ballot should prevent incomplete or duplicate markings where practicable. A vote is formal if it records a unique first preference for a candidate and otherwise complies with the ballot instructions. A vote is informal if no first preference can be identified, more than one candidate is given the same first preference, or the ballot cannot be interpreted consistently with the published instructions.

5. Counting method

The Student Director ballot will use an optional preferential voting method, as configured and approved by the Returning Officer before voting opens, to fill five vacancies. The counting method must treat preferences consistently, identify exhausted votes and produce a reproducible count report. If no candidate enrolled at the Central Coast Campus is elected in the normal count, the Campus Director reservation in section 8 applies before the result is finalised.

6. Preferences and exhausted votes

A preference transfers to the next candidate who remains in the count. A vote becomes exhausted when it contains no further preference for a continuing candidate. Exhausted votes remain part of the count record but are not included when calculating an absolute majority of continuing votes.

7. Withdrawn or ineligible candidates

If a candidate validly withdraws or is found ineligible before the count, that candidate is removed from the ballot count and each affected vote transfers to the next available preference. If ineligibility is identified after a provisional result but before final declaration, the Returning Officer may recount the ballot without that candidate and must record the reasons and outcome.

8. Campus Director reservation

One Student Director position is the Campus Director, being the position reserved under the draft Constitution (clause 5.4(b)). [If no candidate enrolled at the Central Coast Campus is elected in the normal count of the five-vacancy ballot, the highest-ranked continuing eligible Central Coast Campus candidate fills the Campus Director seat. If no eligible Central Coast Campus candidate nominated or remains, the position is filled by the highest-ranked continuing Alternative Eligible Student. If no Alternative Eligible Student nominated or remains, the position may be filled by any eligible Student (draft Constitution, clause 5.4(b)).] Eligibility will ordinarily be verified against University records. The applicable eligibility criteria must be settled before voting opens.

9. Ties

A tie affecting exclusion is resolved by countback to the most recent stage at which the tied candidates had unequal totals. If the tie cannot be resolved by countback, the Returning Officer will resolve it by lot using a documented, impartial method. The same approach applies to a tie affecting the last vacancy to be filled unless the Election Rules specify another method. A countback under this section is a tie-breaking mechanism only. It is distinct from a Countback conducted to fill a casual vacancy (draft Constitution, clause 5.3) under section 10.

10. Casual vacancies – Countback and By-Election

If a casual vacancy arises for a Student Director position and the Board determines that it is to be filled by Countback (draft Constitution, clause 5.3), the Returning Officer re-runs the count from the most recent election (draft Constitution, clause 5.4) for one vacancy only. The vacating Director and any candidate who has since withdrawn, become ineligible or does not consent to fill the vacancy are excluded. Preferences transfer as described in section 6. The highest-ranked continuing eligible consenting candidate is declared elected.

If the casual vacancy is in the Campus Director position, the successful candidate must satisfy the eligibility and order-of-priority requirements for that position (draft Constitution, clause 5.4(b)).

If the Returning Officer determines that the vacancy cannot be filled by Countback, a By-Election must be held. The Returning Officer conducts the By-Election under the Election Rules (draft Constitution, clause 5.4). Votes are counted under this Guideline as if the By-Election were an election for a single vacancy.

The count report requirements in section 12 apply to any Countback or By-Election under this section.

11. Security, confidentiality and observation

- Ballot secrecy must be preserved. Count reports must not identify how an individual voter voted.
- Access to the voting system and count data is limited to the Returning Officer and authorised election personnel.
- The Returning Officer must retain system reports, reconciliations and decisions for the approved records-retention period.
- An authorised independent observer may attend or review aspects of the count if approved by the Returning Officer, subject to confidentiality and security requirements. Candidates do not have an automatic right to appoint a scrutineer unless the Election Rules provide one.

12. Provisional and final results

The Returning Officer will prepare a count report recording turnout, formal and informal votes, exclusions, transfers, exhausted votes, tie decisions and the successful candidates. Results remain provisional until final eligibility is confirmed and any required acceptance is received. The Returning Officer will then formally declare the results, at which point each successful candidate is appointed as a Student Director (draft Constitution, clause 5.4(e)) and publish the results in accordance with the Election Rules.

13. Questions about the count

A candidate may raise a count concern promptly by emailing newSLO@newcastle.edu.au and identifying the ballot, issue and supporting information. The Returning Officer may seek further information, verify the count record and make a determination consistent with the draft Constitution and Election Rules. Decisions are final to the extent provided by those documents and applicable law.