

Referendum Rules 2026

Should Bristol SU be affiliated to the National Union of Students UK (NUS UK)?

The success of the 2026 NUS Referendum is down to you, the campaign teams. Your ability to successfully promote yourself, engage students with your ideas and convince them to vote is key. The ideal referendum is exciting, good-natured and leads to a high turnout at the polls of well-informed, engaged voters. These rules are designed to make this possible, and are based on two overarching principles:

- The referendum process must be fair and properly conducted
- The success of the referendum is based on the participation of campaign teams and accessibility of the process for voters

While we have specific rules for elections and referenda, the rules that apply all year round still apply. These include:

- **SU Rules:** Campaign teams must abide by [Bristol SU's Member Code of Conduct](#). If broken, campaign leaders are subject to Bristol SU's Member Disciplinary Policy & Procedure, which can revoke SU membership and thus disqualify them from the election.
- **University Rules and regulations:** The [University has rules](#) relating to the student community, their behaviour and use of facilities and property. If broken campaign leaders may be subject to the University's disciplinary procedure, which may put their candidacy and student status in jeopardy.
- **The Law:** If campaign teams break the law, the Returning Officer reserves the right to refer the matter to the appropriate authorities.

SU Elections Rules

1. Do not do anything that another campaign team cannot do.
2. Treat all other students and staff with respect. Discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated.
3. Campaign leaders will be held responsible for the conduct and management of their campaign team. Campaigners will be requested to wear a 'campaign team' lanyard, when campaigning.
4. Do not spend more than the budget allocated to your campaign.
5. Do not campaign before the campaigning period (**09:00, Monday 9 March**).
6. Any information about campaign teams not adhering to the rules must be submitted through the [Election Complaints Form](#) to the Deputy Returning Officer before the close of voting (**21:00, Thursday 12 March**).

Campaigning & Voting

7. To help publicise voting times, all campaign material (graphics, videos etc.) must contain the following information about how and when students can vote:

**Vote at bristolsu.org.uk/nus-referendum
09:00 Monday 9 March – 21:00 Thursday 12 March**

8. Campaign materials must only promote the specific campaign representing the chosen side of the referendum question.
9. Lists, databases or networks created to inform a group about specific activities cannot be used to publicise your campaign. You are allowed to create new lists or databases for the purposes of the election.
10. Affiliated Student groups (student media, see **rule 14**) can choose to get involved in the referendum. If they allow one side of the campaign team to post in their spaces for discussion, they need to allow the other to post for fairness. Any endorsement they make sits separately to this (see **rule 12**).
11. Campaign teams are free to post in online groups (including group chats) that are plausibly open for other campaign teams to post in. Affiliated student groups are free to refuse posting access to campaign teams.
12. Student groups; societies and sport clubs may endorse a campaign side if they follow these steps:
- a. They must not endorse until voting has opened. They **must not** post or talk about their endorsement until the campaign period has begun at **09:00 on Monday 9 March**.
 - b. They must hold a Student Group Committee meeting, or a forum of their membership if specified in their group constitution, to discuss if they wish to endorse a side of the campaign.
 - c. They **must** inform the Elections Team by email at bristolsu-elections@bristol.ac.uk and wait for a confirmation email before announcing their endorsement and the voting numbers for the endorsement. Votes must be quorate, by the standards set out in the group's constitution. The candidate they have endorsed cannot do this; it **must** come from the student group committee.
- 13.** Student Community Organisers, Faculty Reps, Chair of Council and Full-time Officers can be part of a campaign team and support a side. Members of Democratic Standards Committee cannot endorse a campaign in the capacity of their role.
14. Student media must provide equal coverage to both sides of the referendum question using whichever medium they operate. This includes any sub-groups within affiliated student groups – affiliated student groups will be responsible for upholding this rule across their presenters, reporters and contributors.
15. Candidates must post as their personal social media account or one specifically set up for their campaign and not as another page to which they have access).
16. Campaign teams must not harass potential voters, check who they are voting for or record votes. Campaign teams must be standing at least 2 meters away from a student who is actively voting and not

touch any voter's voting device or vote on their behalf.

17. Campaign material must foster positive democratic debate and must not make defamatory comments towards other individuals including but not limited to libel or slander, or make false or misleading claims.
18. Campaigners must not use Bristol SU resources to develop or publicise their campaigns, with the exception of spending money as set out in **election rule 29** and provided campaign materials. This includes no usage of either the University and/or Students' Union logo.
19. Anyone who is campaigning on your behalf is on your campaign team and will be considered so for the entirety of the election. Campaign teams that include current officers and elected representatives (e.g. society presidents) are not allowed to use Bristol SU resources for election campaigns (including membership lists and databases).
20. Candidates must have **submitted the SU Elections Candidate Documents form including a signature to say that they have read and agreed to these Rules by Monday 2 March 09:00.**
21. Candidates **must not campaign before 09:00 on Monday 9 March until they have submitted the SU Elections Candidate Documents form including a signature to say that they have read and agreed to these Rules.** This includes but is not limited to: posting on live websites, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter accounts, Facebook pages or any social media specifically supporting their campaign; communications that request voters' support.
22. Campaign teams may announce that they are preparing and gather feedback from students to inform their campaign messages. They can do so by **posting the following message once, on no more than three personal online platforms** (Whatsapp, Instagram etc.):
 - a. 'I'm running the [x] campaign ahead of the NUS Referendum! Campaigning starts on Monday 9 March at 09:00, so I can't say anything more right now, but if you'd like to be involved in the campaign team please get in touch with me privately.'
23. Candidates must not affix stickers or use Cellotape to affix material as part of their campaign.
24. Candidates are responsible for the timely removal of their own campaign material. All materials, including banners and posters **must** be removed by **Friday 13 March 2025 14:00.**

Respectful campaigning behaviour

25. In line with the Jo Cox Foundation's pledges on respectful elections (Appendix 1), candidates must set an appropriate tone when campaigning.
26. Candidates must lead by example to foster constructive democratic debate.

27. Candidates must promote and defend the dignity of others, including their opponents.

Spending Allowances

28. Campaign teams have an allowance for campaign expenditure and must not spend more than this. All campaign expenses (within the allowance) will be refunded by Bristol SU. Each campaign will receive an allowance of £100 .

29. This allowance is to be spent on the campaign and will be refunded on the production of receipts at the end of the election using the expenses form.

30. Any sponsorship, special offers or discounts must be available to all campaigns in a given election. Campaign leaders must report any such opportunities to the Returning Officer before using or receiving benefit from them.

31. Campaign expenditure is any expenditure that is carried out with the purpose of promoting a candidate's campaign. This includes video editing, printing, paid social media content etc. For the avoidance of doubt campaign teams may not bribe voters or provide direct monetary incentive to voters in return for votes. Returning Officer's decision on the application of this definition is final and campaign leaders are advised to check beforehand with the Elections Team and declare all expenditure/materials on their [expenses form](#).

32. All candidates must submit their expenses and receipts to bristolsu-elections@bristol.ac.uk by 21:00 on Thursday 12 March. Failure to do so will delay the results of the election and may lead to a candidate's disqualification.

If the Returning Officer has evidence that any candidate is not adhering to the rules they will assign sanctions as appropriate. Sanctions include, but are not limited to:

- Disqualification from the election
- Bans on campaigning for a certain period of time (or for the entire remainder of the election)
- Confiscation of campaign materials

During the course of the elections, the Returning Officer (RO) may vary or further define the election rules. **Please check your email regularly so you can stay up to date with any changes to the rules or new guidance.**

You cannot begin campaigning unless you have returned a signed copy of the rules via the form you have been sent. If you do start, you may be disqualified from the election.

Appendix

1. Ref to Jo Cox principals
https://www.jocoxfoundation.org/2021_election_pledge

2. Full time officer guidance

Incumbent Full Time Officers can either:

- a. Take annual leave to support and campaign for one side in the referendum
- b. b. Not support any candidate or side and help Bristol SU to advertise the elections, staying neutral and impartial.

3. Precedent across the nation, movement and Bristol SU holds that during a disaffiliation referendum, the National Union of Students be able to defend its position. For the avoidance of doubt and prevention of unfair advantage:

- a) NUS may send elected full-time officers and/or a small number of members of their team to campaign during the referendum period. Bristol SU and the DRO must be made aware of who has been nominated by NUS to campaign.
- b) Any budget spent on campaign materials by NUS **must** be counted **alongside** the campaign budget for the remain/yes campaign i.e. NUS and the remain/yes campaign must not exceed £100 of spend **combined**. The details of any campaign materials used by NUS must be submitted in line with Rule 32 to ensure compliance.
- c) Anyone from NUS campaigning must comply with the election rules, including rule 3, and will be liable to the same sanctions