

Dons Trust Board Elections 2019

Report of the Election Steering Group Chair

1. The 2019 Election Process

1.1. The Election Steering Group (ESG)

The ESG continued with a similar membership to last year, with Julian Edwards and Tudor Jennings continuing to work with the Chair. Neil Springate from the Fulham Supporters Trust continues to act as the independent monitor. As ever, his impartial thoughts brought a valuable clarity to the ESG deliberations.

The Chair remains grateful for their support and challenges and thank them for their involvement.

1.2. Election Rules

There were a number of changes to the Dons Trust Board (DTB) Election Rules for 2019.

- The Trust Secretary is now not allowed to stand as a candidate, nor nominate a candidate (Rule 2)
- Proposers (as well as candidates) must meet the criteria set out in Rule 58 of the Constitution. This includes abiding by the Election Rules and excludes appointed executive officers of subsidiary companies (Rule 5).
- Players and players' representatives may not now stand - the Constitution, Rule 54.d. allows players' representatives to be co-opted to the Board (Rule 5).
- The applicable nomination procedure is that set out on the current nomination form (Rule 6).
- Events supported by the ESG but organised by third parties are subject to the same rules on candidate participation as ESG events (Rule 14).

There were associated changes to the nomination procedure.

- Candidates are now asked if they have signed the Volunteer Code of Conduct and to provide details of volunteer activity. This is to help in understanding where Election Rule 20 conflicts might be seen to arise.
- The need to ensure contact details are up-to-date is emphasised.
- The need for both candidate and proposers to meet the revised Election Rule 5 is emphasised.
- Proposers cannot now propose more than one candidate (but candidates can still propose one other candidate).

1.3. Nominations

The opening of nominations was formally advised to all members and was publicised through electronic media and via the matchday programme.

This year, candidates were able to submit their forms electronically, with verification of proposers via emails sent to the address registered with the Trust. There were problems with two emails, one with a proposer and one with a proposer's response. Unfortunately, they were proposers for the same

candidate, which initially led to some confusion. The lesson for 2020 is to allow more time for verification.

As requested on the nomination form, candidates using paper forms advised the Chair in advance. The forms were delivered by hand.

As in previous years, the electronic formats (including the photographs) adopted by candidates varied significantly, although less than at previous elections. It did prove possible to reformat all documents and photographs in a way that permitted incorporation in a single document, but it all took time. In some cases, candidates were asked to resubmit trimmed or substitute photographs, particularly where the photograph included a small image against a considerable area of background.

1.4. Election Campaign

1.4.1. Arrangements

As has become the practice, the candidates' statements were issued in advance of the ballot papers.

The electronic ballot again used Survey Monkey.

As usual, non-receipt of ballot papers (paper or electronic) led to questions about voter eligibility. This year, there were again comparatively few.

1.4.2. Conflicts

One of the candidates is an executive officer of a subsidiary company. The candidate formally confirmed to the Chair that, if elected, they would stand down from that role.

Election Rule 20 makes it clear that, as a general rule, candidates may continue with their own duties as Trust and club volunteers during the campaign. This year, the Chair formally agreed to several such actions. The approach taken is to consider how the issue might be viewed by the wider membership, in part based on concerns raised during previous campaigns.

The roles included:

- Representing the DTB in offering hospitality at Home matches and accepting hospitality at Away matches;
- Representing the DTB at a DT member's funeral.

An alternative arrangement was made in a further case.

1.4.3. Modern media publicity and the ballot

The ESG again supported and facilitated "the 9Yrs Podcast" running live YouTube interviews with candidates. The decision as to whether to participate was left to the individual candidates - all did.

As the candidates' statements had already been published, they formed the basis of some of the questions from both the "the 9Yrs Podcast" interviewers and the Trust members who logged on during the interviews.

The YouTube sessions were generally considered to be a success.

The ESG is very grateful to "the 9Yrs Podcast" team for their involvement.

In view of the expected impact of the interviews, the electronic ballots, which were to be issued that weekend, were delayed until the interviews had been "uploaded".

It was arranged with the printers that the paper ballots would be posted on the previous Friday, so that the members concerned received their papers at about the same time. Astonishingly, given the normal postal service in the area, some papers were delivered on the following morning, requiring early deployment of the ballot box.

There were no official ESG Twitter or Webjam debates this year, although candidates were encouraged to be active on Webjam.

A Club official has informally suggested to the Chair that they have staff who could assist with podcast-type debates. The Chair is considering the implications of this.

1.4.4. Other publicity

Whilst most Trust members now rely on electronic media and electronic communications for their information, about 8% do not. Ensuring that both groups of Trust members are kept informed at about the same time is not straightforward. Whilst it is possible to advise the "electronic" group on an almost "live" ongoing basis, preparing a mail drop takes time and resources.

The chair did receive one informal complaint that the "paper" group were not kept informed in the same way as the electronic group. As candidate postings and debates on various media sites develop quickly (the immediacy being one of their attractions), it is not clear that there is an easy answer to this.

ESG provides the DTB Secretariat with information for publication. Formal communications, whether on social media, by e-mail or by post, must be issued by the DTB Secretary.

1.4.5 Issues

Two issues arose during the election

Date of handover

The two-year term of office of a DTB member is defined in the DT Constitution as running from Annual General Meeting (AGM) to AGM. However, ESG was advised that, this year, the AGM might be delayed, possibly until February or March 2020. ESG was told that the DTB was concerned that this would lead to a situation where there were important on-going matters to deal with in the new year, but the DTB membership would be changing at an indeterminate date during that period. ESG was also told that the delay in the AGM date was related to completing the accounts, not to other matters, the details of which were not advised to ESG.

ESG's initial suggestion was that the DTB would hold the AGM as planned, ESG would report the election, the new members would take office and the DTB would then adjourn the AGM *sine die*. As an adjourned AGM cannot discuss material that was not part of the original agenda, this was not possible. ESG therefore agreed that a motion be put to the Special General Meeting to be held on 9 December 2019 (approximately when the AGM was originally scheduled) asking members to agree to the candidates successful in the election taking up office after that meeting. ESG asked that the motion be

amended to make it clear that responsibility for the accounts remained with the previous DTB and this was agreed.

Rob Crane resignation

About one week before the close of voting, Rob Crane (the DTB member liaising with ESG), advised the ESG Chair, in strict confidence, that he would be resigning his position on the DTB, approximately mid-way through his two-year term. As one of the roles of ESG, as set out in the Election Rules, is to advise the DTB on election matters, the Chair gave consideration to the options. Three were identified:

1. A by-election. That had been done before (in about 2004) when a successful candidate withdrew after the results had been announced, but before starting the two-year term. The by-election followed the normal election timescale, starting in January to avoid Christmas, and completed late February / early March (the current ESG Chair was a member of ESG at the time). The turnout was remembered to have been very low. In that case, the successful candidate served for around 18 months. If a by-election was called in this case, the candidate would only serve for around 6 months.
2. A co-opted person to occupy one of the nominally elected positions (this should be contrasted with the position in 2018, when Edward Leek was co-opted to provide a specific skill). This last happened in 2012, when there were not enough candidates to fill all the places available (let alone have an election). However, the co-opted person does not count as an elected person for certain quoracy and voting purposes. Starting with a reduced elected membership could lead to difficulties.
3. Taking #6 in the voting for a one-year term. This was the solution adopted in 2015, when Kris Stewart resigned. However, that resignation was early enough in the election process for ESG to include the extra one-year place in the pre-vote material. This option has the advantage over #2 in that the person elected has at least some electoral mandate, possibly more than a candidate being elected *nem con* because there were not enough candidates.

The Chair's proposal was that #3 be adopted, i.e., that whoever came #6 in the vote would take up Rob's place until the election in 2020. Following a number of exchanges, the DTB Secretary and Hannah Kitcher, the DTB member who had taken over Rob Crane's ESG liaison role, agreed with the proposal. Before the close of the voting period, the DTB Secretary and ESG Chair discussed the situation with another continuing DTB member, who was content with the proposal.

Before the count, the situation was discussed with the independent monitor, who was content with the choice of #3. The other members of ESG have also unanimously supported the choice of #3.

2. The 2019 Election

2.1. Nominations

There were eight candidates, including two retiring members, for, initially, five positions. A ballot was, therefore, necessary.

Candidate	Proposer 1	Proposer 2
Edward Leek	Rob Crane	Anna Kingsley
Dennis Lowndes	Laurence Lowne	Stephen Chandler
Mark Davis	Matthew Breach	David Hall
Mark Sturges	Maria Butler	Grace McMillan
Tim Hillyer	John Lynch	Nicole Hammond
Graham Stacey	Marc Jones	Marc Lewis
Jane Lonsdale	Paul Raymond	Charlie Talbot
Anne Williams	Hannah Kitcher	Mark Davis

In accordance with the usual practice, the status of all candidates and proposers was checked with the Membership Secretary before the nominations were announced.

2.2 Result

Candidate	Electronic votes	Paper votes	Total votes
Jane Lonsdale	695	41	736
Mark Davis	628	42	670
Edward Leek	558	32	590
Tim Hillyer	513	34	547
Graham Stacey	464	29	493
Anne Williams	442	28	470
Dennis Lowndes	426	29	455
Mark Sturges	285	21	306

Jane Lonsdale, Mark Davis, Edward Leek, Tim Hillyer and Graham Stacey are therefore elected to the DTB, to serve for two years.

Anne Williams is elected to the DTB, to serve for one year.

2.3 Statistics

The number of Trust members entitled to vote was 3384, of whom 1019 cast ballots, a turnout of 30.1%.

What was less noticeable this year was the difference in turnout between "electronic" and "paper" DT members. There were 3143 "electronic" members, of whom 963 voted, a turnout of 30.6%. There were 241 "paper" members, of whom 56 voted, a turnout of 23%.

Electronic voting was concentrated into two days. Around 275 votes were cast on 04/11/19, the date the e-mail was sent, and nearly 300 on 21/11/19, after an e-mail was sent to all those who had not already voted.

Last year, number of Trust members entitled to vote was 2877, of whom 1268 cast ballots, a turnout of 44%.

In 2017, the election was uncontested, but, in 2016, the turnout was 27% on a membership of 2917. In 2015, the turnout was 39%, in 2014, 32% and in 2013, 38%. In 2012, there were not enough candidates to fill the positions available, but the previous four years averaged 44% on a much smaller membership base, typically 1500 – 2000.

It is interesting to note that the number and range of candidates continues to lead to much more diverse voting patterns. In 2015, when there were seven candidates, the three leading candidates all attracted votes from around 83% of those voting. This year, only the four leading candidates received votes from more than 50% of those voting. Last year, three of the successful candidates attracted votes from under 50% of those voting; in contrast, in 2016, the leading unsuccessful candidate was chosen by 51% of those who voted.

This is partly a consequence of our multiple “first past the post” system. The Chair has illustrative worked examples explaining a range of different possible scenarios.

3. Thanks

In addition to my ESG colleagues (see Section 2.1), my thanks go to David Gowns, DTB Secretary, Rob Crane, DTB Deputy Chair, the continuing DTB member who performed the liaison role during the campaign, and Hannah Kitcher, the DTB member who took over from Rob.

John Dolan, Chair, Election Steering Group

1 December 2019