

Advice and Guidance for the 2019 General Election

Key points:

- This guide aims to help staff and students who may wish to undertake activity during the General Election period.
- The University of Sussex is regulated by the Electoral Commission during the election period. We have a legal responsibility to comply with specific rules and how we engage with politicians/parties must be followed during the regulated period – the timeframe where individuals/parties will be campaigning to be elected to office.
- Sussex is politically neutral and should be seen to be independent from party politics. This allows us to use our voice effectively to act as advocates for staff and students, on behalf of the institution, throughout the year.
- The University recognises that academics may wish to comment on or critique policy positions. The principles of academic freedom continue to be encouraged and celebrated at Sussex.
- If you would like to work with, or are approached by a local politician or candidate during this period or are planning any events involving any political representative (including candidates not affiliated with a party) or are aware of any staff/students who are planning to stand as a candidate, please contact a member of the External Relations division. Details at the end of this document.
- Please be mindful about any communications or endorsements you may make from University accounts or channels (including comments, reports, briefings, emails, tweets, Facebook posts, posters) and ensure they are not party-political, or in any way infer University support of one candidate over another.

BACKGROUND

The General Election offers Sussex students and staff a great opportunity to engage with Parliamentary candidates and debate a range of issues related to the political process and the governing of the UK. External Relations will continue to identify and undertake activity to appropriately promote Sussex, its staff and students during this period – such as providing expert commentary in the media. We have also undertaken a campaign to encourage voter registration.

The University is working with the Students' Union, student societies, IDS and colleagues throughout the institution to arrange hustings for candidates for local parliamentary seats. External Relations is in touch with the political parties and related stakeholders on this front. If you are planning to hold your own political event or are approached by any candidates who wish to visit Sussex during the campaign period, please contact External Relations and we will be able to provide advice and if needed, support you with arrangements.

The University is required to comply with the Transparency of Lobbying, Non Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014. The legislation is regulated and enforced by the Electoral Commission who provide [guidance](#) to non-party campaigners during the election. As a registered charity, the University of Sussex must comply with [Charity Commission guidelines](#) relating to UK charities and elections and 'retain the essential quality of independence'.

All parliamentary seats will be contested following the dissolution of Parliament on 6 November 2019. This advice note will apply from now until 13 December or until the next government is formed.

PRE-ELECTION PERIOD

The pre-election period (sometimes referred to as 'Purdah'), sets the conventions governing the conduct of the civil service and non-departmental government bodies including research councils and Office for Students, began on the 6 November. This guidance can be read on the Cabinet Office website [here](#). The following guidance needs to be considered in relation to UK Government departments or UK Research and Innovation funded research:

- Any press releases about new research funding that are scheduled to be issued during this time need to be sent to the relevant press office i.e. ESRC or DFID three working days before they are planned to be issued.
- Researchers called upon to provide expert comment about the elections or local issues during this period should do so under their organisational affiliation and not attribute research to the funding body. This also applies to printed materials such as features in commercial magazines and newsletters which may have been scheduled before the election was announced.
- Researchers scheduled to deliver papers or speak about their research at academic or public conferences relevant to the elections must not attribute their research to the funding body.
- Any Government Department or UK Research and Innovation funded data which relates to voting patterns, or predicts or influences voting behaviour that is currently not in the public domain should not be published during this period. This includes publication in magazines and newsletters, press releases and press announcements and academic conferences.
- Any posts to websites and social media platforms should be done with due care and attention to the principles above. When writing blogs, posting views or content on websites and public social media sites about election-related issues should not be attributed to funding from a UK Government department or Research Council or associated with its investment.

ENGAGING WITH POLITICIANS

You may be asked to provide your support to a candidate in the form of a quote for campaign literature or other form of endorsement for a candidate, such as a social media post. You are of course free to do this as an individual. However it is requested that you do not reference your role or association with the University of Sussex as it may lead to implied support of a candidate by the institution.

If you are uncertain about whether your activity or interaction with a politician is fully compliant with the relevant legislation and regulation, we recommend you discuss the details with a member of the External Relations division. The normal events and freedom of speech policies apply throughout the year so you will also need to ensure your activities are in line with the usual University processes. These policies can be found [here](#).

DEALING WITH PRINT, BROADCAST AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Any party political comments you make during this period should be kept separate from your role at Sussex. When making political comments online or in the media, please consider the following:

- If your social media account states that you work for the University, please ensure your profile also mentions that 'views are your own and are not necessarily those of the University'.
- Check how you have phrased something to limit the chances of it being misinterpreted.
- Retweeting comments or links to articles may be interpreted as a reflection of your own views. Take note if you are regularly posting stories from a particular type of publication or website, which may be associated with certain political views.

If you are approached with a request to do a media interview, in your professional capacity, please treat this like any other journalist enquiry and let the press office know (press@sussex.ac.uk). Ideally this would happen ahead of the interview so the team can provide you or the journalist with any additional support.

STANDING AS CANDIDATES, ACTING AS PARTY OFFICIALS OR CAMPAIGNING FOR A POLITICAL PARTY/ CANDIDATE

If you wish to stand as a candidate, or are a party official, please contact External Relations who can provide further guidance. Candidates or party officials (including volunteers) must ensure it is clear they do not represent the University whilst participating in campaign activities and should campaign in their own time without using University resources.

For further information, please contact the External Relations division: 01273 678 8888

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