

# **Notice of Decision from the Deputy Returning Officer**

## **– 2026 Officer Election, Grievance 1**

**Details of Complaint:** On 12/02/26, we received a complaint which alleged Postgraduate & International Officer candidate Mercy Martins was engaged in pre-campaigning by sending a message in a group chat which contained eight members, all of whom are PGR Academic Reps in the faculty of Health & Social Services.

The message thread had been discussing projects related to being academic reps until January 26<sup>th</sup>.

The message in question, posted in or around February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026, reads, under Mercy's name:

“Hello everyone. I would like to unofficially inform you all that I would potentially be aspiring for the SU role of postgraduate and international officer election happening this month. And while we cannot start campaign until the 19<sup>th</sup> of Feb or officially inform anyone, I wanted to give you all a heads up as I would particularly need your help in sharing the word when the time comes next week. I think with the success we have had with the faculty, we might be able to get the position. Thank you all”

**Analysis:** There are a number of factors which could lead to this message being a violation of campaign rules or not. The rules clearly state:

- Early campaigning is strictly prohibited. This includes any activity by a candidate or their campaign team that promotes the candidate or encourages students to vote for them before the official campaign period begins. Any breach of this rule may result in penalties at the discretion of the Deputy Returning Officer (DRO).
- The following are not seen as 'early campaigning':
  1. Telling close friends about your prospective candidacy.
  2. Creating election content in a public place ahead of the election period (as long as there is reasonably no form of campaigning).
  3. Researching for a campaign/manifesto. Prospective candidates can contact specific students/student leaders indicating that they are 'considering running for a role'. In this regard, telling others that you are considering to run (is not telling them you are running), and not telling

them the position (unless it is reasonably relevant) also makes it clear you are not lobbying for votes or trying to put others off of running

With exemptions carved out in the rules for items clearly not seen as ‘early campaigning’, it is worth examining if any of the exemptions apply.

Firstly, were the eight individuals in the group chat close friends of the candidate? Upon conversation with the candidate, it was expressed that not all members of the group are close friends, but rather professional colleagues.

Finally, the post uses the word “informally” to express that they would be “potentially” aspiring to a specific role. This appears to violate the exception to the early campaigning rule, which says you should not share the specific position you are running for. In conversation with the candidate, the candidate was able to understand how this post could be seen more as campaigning rather than research or campaign planning.

Given that Online campaigning begins on February 19 2026, the matters at issue from February 12 2026 would qualify as in advance of, or pre-campaign.

The candidate was apologetic, and was credible in explaining that this post was a one-off effort in a single group chat in an effort to recruit campaign team members.

**Conclusion:** There are two tests that must be passed for this to be seen as a violation of election rules.

Firstly, it must be established that the message / post in and of itself and removed from context would qualify as pre-campaigning. I determine that the message is reasonably considered to be a campaigning message.

Secondly, it must be established that none of the exceptions apply to this message / post, when put into context. In this instance, where two of the exceptions apply to the situation for consideration, neither of them apply in fact, as the post was made to a group which went beyond close friends, and which made clear that the candidate was running for a specific role.

I believe that the candidate only posted in this one group chat, with eight student members, and that the candidate was genuinely remorseful for the post, lacking the intent to pre-campaign. The candidate informed me that the post / message had been taken down or deleted, and I believe them. Nonetheless, the post was made.

**Decision:** For the reasons outlined above, I am finding Mercy Martins responsible for breaking the election rules by pre-campaigning.

The sanctions applied will be:

- 1 – A compliance directive to remove the message in question
- 2 – A written warning, with instructions to follow the elections rules going forward
- 3 – A 1 hour online campaigning ban at the start of online campaigning

**Issued:** 13/02/26



**Sam Kilgour**  
**Deputy Returning Officer**



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