

# PAB election process proposal

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## Introduction

Until 2008 inclusive, the PAB has (I think) always had enough candidates standing that an election has been necessary. However, in 2009 this was not the case; indeed, there were fewer candidates than vacancies.

While this is unsatisfactory in itself, it also raises the point that the electorate have not had an opportunity to pronounce upon the suitability of the candidates. Instead, they must accept them whether they think them suitable or not.

A related issue applies where there are sufficient candidates to force an election. It might be that two or three of the candidates are judged by the vast majority of the electorate to be unsuitable for the position. Nevertheless, the STV process will always elect *somebody* to every vacancy, even if they only received a single vote.

This paper proposes two possible solutions to this “democratic deficit”.

## Solution 1 – “No Other Candidate”

The first solution I am proposing is called “No Other Candidate”, or NOC. This is a special pseudo-candidate that stands in every election. It indicates that the voter does not believe that any candidate, other than those ranked higher than NOC, are suitable to be elected. This is different to simply omitting those candidates, which indicates indifference.

NOC behaves like a normal candidate except for the following matters:

- If NOC is elected, the election stops at that point. All remaining places (including the one NOC would have filled) remain vacant.
- The STV rule that says that, where the number of candidates is equal to or less than the number of remaining places, does not apply while NOC is still a candidate. Instead, the normal quota and elimination processes carry on.
- There is no point in a voter putting any candidate after NOC (that is, with lower preference than) on a ballot paper, since a vote will never transfer to them. However, I do *not* propose that papers breaking this are deemed invalid.

Note that NOC *can* be eliminated, in which case either all places will be filled or all remaining candidates will be elected.

## **Solution 2 – Minimum necessary vote**

The second solution I am proposing is called the “minimum necessary vote”. With STV, a quota is set which is just large enough to prevent too many candidates achieving it simultaneously. For example, with 1000 votes and 4 places, the quota is 250. If every voter included every candidate on their ballot paper, then every elected candidate would end up with a score of at least 250.

However, if a ballot paper includes only candidates who are eliminated at an early stage, it can no longer be used. If there were enough such “dead” votes, it might be that no remaining candidates can reach the quota. For example, suppose there are 1000 votes and 4 places and, after two candidates have been elected, 300 votes are “dead”. With 400 votes having gone to the elected candidates (any surplus over the quota of 250 is transferred or generates dead votes), there are only 300 votes left for the two remaining places. STV addresses this by progressively reducing the quota; in this case it would reduce to 150. This effect can be seen for real in the 2006 PAB election: the initial quota is 48.50, but Kells is elected with only 36.45 and Hashwa with 34.47.

Under the standard STV rules the quota can be reduced without restriction, even down to only a single vote. My proposal is that, instead, there is a minimum quota that a candidate must meet. The changes to the normal STV process are:

- Once the quota reduces to the minimum, it stays there no matter how many votes become dead.
- The STV rule that says that, where the number of candidates is equal to or less than the number of remaining places, does not apply. Instead, the normal quota and elimination processes carry on.
- A voter can put *no* candidates on their ballot paper, indicating that they do not support any candidate. (In standard STV, such papers can be excluded before the process starts without affecting the result.) This will affect the initial quota and, therefore, the minimum. It may be worthwhile having a special “I confirm this is what I meant” tick box on the paper.

I would suggest that the minimum should be one-third of the initial quota. With 4 places, this means that a candidate normally needs 25% of the voters to support them, but an absolute minimum of 6 $\frac{2}{3}$ %.

For example, looking at the 2008 PAB election the initial quota was 39.8. Therefore the minimum would be 13.27. The election results would have been unchanged.

## **Insufficient candidates**

Applying either of these rules means that it makes sense to hold an election even when there are insufficient candidates. This is because NOC might be elected, eliminating those candidates that come behind it, or some candidates might not meet the minimum threshold. In either case, this is an indication that the electorate does not support those candidates.

### **No co-option**

Where a candidate fails to be elected because of one of these new rules, this indicates they do not have the support of the electorate. In this situation, it would seem perverse to co-opt that candidate to fill a vacancy. I would therefore propose that the PAB adopt a policy of not co-opting any candidate who, in the most recent election, obtained less votes than NOC or the minimum (whether they were eliminated or simply remained after all candidates were elected).

### **Application to Board elections**

While I am not advocating applying this proposal to Board elections at the present time, experience with it in the PAB might lead the Board to consider adopting it as well.