

# Crowds gather in Union bar to ring in the changes, but Manchester student constituencies hold fast

Jennie Agg and Girish Gupta

'One in, one out' at the Students' Union normally means a big gig or club night, but last Thursday a different kind of party was the night's hot ticket. Putting paid to rumours of campus apathy, students turned up in droves to see the general election result counted in at the Union's all-night party.

Queues formed on the steps of the University of Manchester Students' Union (UMSU) building as students waited to join the hoards gathered in the bar at the event hosted by the Politics Society. While inside, the capacity crowd watched as the possibility of an outright majority for any party looked increasingly unlikely.

However, at the forefront of many students' minds was the revelation that many Withington constituents - including large numbers of students - had been unable to vote, after they were turned away from over-stretched polling stations.

One local who saw events unfold at the Ladybarn Community Centre told *Student Direct: Mancunian*: "Don't you ever tell me that students are apathetic. I was blown away by the numbers that came out to vote. People were saying how they'd never seen anything like it and how wonderful it was that everyone was taking an interest in democracy."

"But in the end it was real shame, especially as there were lots of first time voters who were looking forward to voting and couldn't."

Rebecca James, 20, was turned away from a polling station in Ladybarn after queuing for an hour.

She told the *Manchester Evening News*: "I am really angry. I'm a first time voter and have been looking forward to being able to vote for a while. This was not our fault at all. It was due to poor organisation and not having enough staff. There were only two desks and a massive queue."

Yet, aside from the apparent frustrations at the very end of the day's voting, witnesses reported how understanding most people had been towards the staff manning the polling station, with two sympathetic students even making an unprompted trip to Fallowfield Sainsbury's to buy the busy council volunteers some food.

Some voters who had been denied their chance to vote made their way to the Town Hall to complain, however they were dispersed by mounted police. As *Student Direct: Mancunian* went to press, it was understood that, because of the locked out voters, there could be a legal challenge to the election results.

Back at the Union, cheers greeted victories for both the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats as the results were declared, while the Tories appeared to have less support from the crowd.

The party hold over the Manchester constituencies

remained largely unchanged, although in Manchester Central, Manchester Gorton and Salford & Eccles the Lib Dems managed to close the gap on the Labour incumbents.

Lib Dem MP John Leech beat Lucy Powell to hold onto Manchester Withington, a seat that Labour had been gunning for after losing it by a slight margin in 2005. Although still a close race, Leech increased his majority, finishing 1,850 votes clear of rival Powell.

Labour veteran MP Gerald Kaufman held onto his seat in Gorton, taking a massive 50 per cent of the vote. Labour candidates Tony Lloyd for Manchester Central and Hazel Blears in Salford & Eccles also won out, despite 6.1 per cent and 9.4 per cent swings respectively to the Liberal Democrats chipping into their majorities.

Nationally, the Green Party gained their first MP at Westminster - party leader Caroline Lucas in Brighton Pavillion. While notable casualties included Lib Dem frontbencher Lembit Opik who lost his Montgomeryshire seat after suffering a 13.2 per cent swing to the Conservatives.

Organisers of the Union all-night party, Velida Pudic, Lech Sikora-Sikorski and Jonathan Ridge expressed their delight at how well the event had gone. However, alluding to the inconclusive outcome, Ridge added: "We'll be back in six months for the next election..."



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CROWDED... The Union Bar on Thursday