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Any questions regarding the Code of Practice should in the first instance be addressed to the students’ union academic representative co-ordinator: scott.dawson@sheffield.ac.uk
1. Purpose of the Code of Practice

The Code of Practice is a working document that acts as guidance for both students and staff on how academic representation functions at the University of Sheffield.

This document should be referred to if you are looking for further information on the various types of academic representation at Sheffield, the academic representation recruitment cycle, the responsibilities of those involved in the system and an explanation of how student staff committee meetings should function.

Further working documents that provide best practice guidelines will sit underneath this document. A condensed edition of the Code of Practice should be disseminated to all students at the beginning of their course, through their student handbooks and on departmental webpages.

2. Definition of Student Academic Representation

What is an academic student representative? (also known as academic rep)

An academic representative is a student who has been elected by peers or has volunteered to represent the students in their department and work with staff to improve their academic (learning and teaching) experience. A student academic representative is a voluntary role which is supported by the Students’ Union, which provides training and gathers feedback from academic reps on students’ educational experience.

This role is distinct from that of a Student Associate in Learning and Teaching (SALT), which is not included in this Code of Practice. The SALT role is a paid opportunity for which students apply competitively to work with staff to deliver on a defined Learning and Teaching project.

A system for student academic representation is one of the ways in which the University meets its responsibility to provide opportunities for students to engage in learning and teaching, and being a critical mechanism for enabling continual development of university Learning & Teaching practices. This is done for the primary benefit of supporting and developing a rich community of learners. For more information on academic representation guidance, see the Quality Assurance Agency’s Quality Code Chapter B5.

Other forms of student consultation are not covered in this document. This is because they are undertaken on a case by case basis within departments, faculties or central university services.
3. Structure of Student Academic Representation

Student representation at the University of Sheffield is formalised through departmental student staff committees (SSCs) and faculty student staff committees (FSSCs). This is the primary format within which academic representatives meet and discuss topics with relevant departmental or faculty staff.

Postgraduate taught students (PGT) in most departments are represented at the same SSCs as undergraduates. However, some departments may wish to create a separate committee structure for PGT students, or include them in the postgraduate research (PGR) committee structure. This can be done at the discretion of the department.

Student representation must also be provided on departmental learning and teaching committees and on faculty learning and teaching committees. This can take the form of inviting current department or faculty academic representatives, or by inviting other student volunteers within a department or faculty.

The exact structure of student representation may differ between individual departments and faculties in order to suit their own structures and to enable student attendance. Regardless of format, student attendance at such meetings should always be an opportunity for gathering opinions and providing feedback on action taken to address specific issues.

Departments and faculties should ensure that they have a student-staff committee in place with a full range of student academic representatives. All committees should have clear membership, terms of reference and regular meetings, which should be minuted. Learning and Teaching Services will keep a record of all formal faculty level student staff committees.

4. Purpose of Student Academic Representation

Academic representation at the University of Sheffield is fundamental to ensure student feedback, ideas and concerns are addressed within departments and faculties.

The academic representatives roles, regardless of their specific title or work, aim:

- To engage students in partnership, working with staff to improve their educational experience.
- To enable students, on behalf of their peer group, to raise issues of a learning and teaching nature with departments and/or faculties, and work with staff to resolve problems.
- To ensure an effective student voice at all departmental and faculty levels.
- To gain feedback from students on current developments in learning and teaching.
- To create a student-centred, consistent approach in dealing with student issues across the university.
5. Types of Student Academic Representation

Academic representatives is an overall title for all forms of student academic representation at the University of Sheffield. Within this, academic representatives can take on various roles, each of which have different levels of workload and responsibilities. These roles will be explained in detail below:

5.1: Course Representation (Course Reps)
Course representation exists for the representation of students on a course year. These student representatives will relay the views of their course peers to staff through student staff committees.

A recommended course rep structure is held by the students’ union for departments, faculties and students to utilise as best practice.

5.2: Student Staff Committee Chairs (SSC Chairs)
Student staff committee chairs exist to help co-ordinate fellow academic representatives and academic staff during student staff committees (SSCs). They ensure relevant matters are addressed throughout the meeting and that any agreed action points are followed up.

SSC chairs are appointed from the current group of elected course representatives for a department. Similarly, a faculty chair is appointed from the current group of elected faculty representatives. Chairs may be placed on a ‘rotating system’ from meeting to meeting. In this instance, any rep who has taken on the role of committee chair, should have this noted on the appropriate pro-forma.

In the situation that a student chair is not available, either due to attendance or not willing to take on the role, a relevant department staff member may chair or co-chair instead.

5.3: Departmental Representation (Department Reps)
Departmental representatives are student course representatives who may take on additional roles of representation within their department. These roles will typically involve a reduced number of students representing the whole department at committees such as, but not exclusive to, learning and teaching committees, board of studies and health and safety meetings.

Some departments may only use course representation and exclude a fixed departmental role title to fit their own structures.

5.4: Faculty Representation
Student academic representatives at Faculty level provide students with a forum to raise broader learning and teaching issues, and to influence the development of learning and teaching agendas at faculty level through faculty student staff committees. (FSSCs)
6. Schedule for Elections and Recruitment

Departments must recruit representatives either through elections by the relevant student body, or by asking for volunteers from the relevant student cohort.

Academic departments are solely responsible for organising the appointment of course/departmental academic reps.

Departments are also responsible for informing Learning and Teaching Services (LeTS) and the Students’ Union, via the secretary of the Faculty Student-Staff Committee, of academic reps that have agreed to become or to attend, Faculty level SSCs.

LeTS and the SU are responsible for ensuring the necessary support is in place for the faculty representatives to fulfil their role. The students’ union will provide recruitment resources and is happy to assist departments with the organisation of the appointment of reps when invited.

6.1: Course Representatives Recruitment:

There should be a minimum of 2 course reps per year group with further considerations for dual honours or combination courses. The students’ union places no maximum limit on the number of course representatives and actively encourages departments to have as many course reps as possible to ensure effective representation of the student voice within each department.

Course representatives should be recruited no later than week 4 of semester 1. Departments should notify the students’ union academic representation co-ordinator of the following details of each course representative:

- Registration Number
- Name
- E-mail
- Programme Title
- Year of Study
- Level of Study
- The role of the Academic Rep (Course rep, Department Rep, Chair etc…)

This must also be submitted through the appropriate pro-forma no later than week 4 of semester 1 each year. These dates are set to ensure that details of the Students’ Union training can be distributed promptly.

6.2: Student Staff Committee Chairs Recruitment:

Committee chairs are appointed at the first departmental or faculty student staff committee meeting of the academic year from the current group of elected course or faculty representatives. Once the chair has been selected, the details of the committee chair must be updated through
the appropriate pro-forma to the Students’ Union no later than two weeks following the first student staff committee meeting. This applies to both departmental and faculty level meetings. Chairs may be placed on a ‘rotating system’ from meeting to meeting. In this instance, any rep who has taken on the role of committee chair, should have this noted on the appropriate pro-forma.

6.3: Departmental Representatives Recruitment:
If a department has specific department representative roles, there should be a minimum of 2 departmental representatives for each department, with further considerations for dual honours or combination courses. Departmental representatives can be recruited either:

- During the course representative recruitment cycle as a separate role. In this instance their details should be submitted by the end week 4, semester 1.
- Or appointed from the current group of elected course representatives during the first departmental student staff committee meeting of the academic year. In this instance their details must be submitted via the appropriate pro-forma no later than two weeks following the first student staff committee meeting (SSC).

6.4: Faculty Representatives Recruitment:
There should be a minimum of 1 undergraduate and 1 postgraduate representative from each department to attend faculty student staff committee meetings. Further consideration should be made for the demographic of each department when seeking further representatives. Staff in departments will invite nominations from students for this role, usually via the first Departmental Student-Staff Committee of the year, and inform the secretary of the Faculty Student-Staff Committee who has been appointed. However, faculty representatives can also be recruited from the whole cohort within a department and are not restricted to current course representatives.

- If elected as separate role, their details should be submitted via the appropriate pro-forma by the end week 4, semester 1.
- If appointed from the current group of elected course representatives during the first departmental student staff committee meeting of the academic year, their details must be submitted via the appropriate pro-forma no later than two weeks following the first student staff committee meeting (SSC).

Secretaries of Faculty Student-Staff Committees should notify the students’ union academic representation co-ordinator of the names of the elected faculty representatives on the appropriate pro-forma no later than two weeks following the first FSSC meeting.
7. The roles of Student Representatives, Faculties, Departments and the Students’ Union

7.1: Role of student representatives:
Student representatives are expected to:

- Fulfil requirements of their role as set out in the role description.
- Attend at least 75% of relevant meetings and formally report back to the students’ union as to topics discussed.
- Complete all relevant students’ union training and attend any departmental/faculty-specific induction.
- Fulfil any further roles for which they have taken responsibility such as chair of committee.

7.2: Role of Faculties and Departments:
Faculty and department staff SSC Co-ordinators will:

- Facilitate the recruitment of student representatives.
- Facilitate the effective support of student representation by providing administrative support to meetings such as organising meetings and agendas.
- Provide the students’ union with all relevant data required for the completion of HEAR eligibility. At Department level this is completed by the staff SSC coordinator. At Faculty level this should be completed by the FSSC staff secretary.
- Induct student representatives into the department and/or faculty. This includes introducing them to learning and teaching structures and priorities as well as historical context of academic representation in the previous academic year.
- Facilitate further student representation that occurs outside of meetings such as one-to-one sessions, discussion boards or online approaches.
- Facilitate the effective communication between students and student representatives, incorporating recommendations and advice from the students’ union. This documentation can be found via the students’ union webpages.
- Learning and Teaching Services faculty SSC co-ordinators will work with the faculties to provide support to faculty representatives based on the points above.

How the role of Staff SSC co-ordinator is delegated may be done at the discretion of the individual department. If the role changes hands between staff members within a department, the old staff SSC co-ordinator is responsible for informing the students’ union academic representation co-ordinator of the change. Guidance and advice on the remit and work of this role can be requested from the students’ union academic representation co-ordinator.

7.3: Role of Students’ Union Academic Representation Co-ordinator
The Students’ Union Academic Representation Co-ordinator will:

- Provide departments, faculties and further relevant university services with the resources and support needed for the recruitment of student representatives.
- Provide training and support to all student representatives, and will be in regular contact
with them to ensure that they are well informed about higher education issues and further opportunities within their roles. Current links to training and further resource can be found through the students’ union academic representative webpage.

- Ensure the HEAR record of each student representative is kept up to date in relation to activities undertaken which are relevant to the HEAR record.
- Provide advice and support to university academic departments and relevant university services to ensure a consistent approach to academic representation across the institution.

8. Guidance on Departmental Student-Staff Committees (SSC)

Further to the core guidance provided below more operational guidelines and support will be produced annually by the students’ union. This will take the form of good practice guidelines for student staff committees that departments can utilise for ensuring these meetings are inclusive and productive. These are circulated over the summer period prior to the new academic year.

8.1: Membership

Students:

- A minimum of 2 course representatives per year group. More may be invited depending on department structure.
- 2 postgraduate taught and 2 postgraduate research representatives should be invited when a separate postgraduate SSC does not exist.
- 1 representative from the relevant departmental society(s). This should be an elected society committee member, preferable the academic representative or the society president.
- The relevant Students’ Union councilor for the department. Further information on this role can be found under point 12 of this document.
- Representative roles where needed as deemed appropriate by the Student Staff Committee, such as SALT’s for the purposes of informing their projects.

Staff:

- The department student staff co-ordinator.
- Head of department, director of learning and teaching and programme leader.
- Departmental librarian
- A staff representative from each academic year group within a department. (Including PG staff if applicable)

8.2: Topics for Discussion:

The Students’ Union recommends the use of a basic structured agenda where all members are allowed to contribute under the key points, facilitating both quality assurance and quality enhancement. Further points can be added to the agenda but members should be encouraged to contribute under the standing items.
A basic agenda should use the categories below as standing items:

- Learning and Teaching
- Assessment and Feedback
- Academic Support
- Organisation
- Resources
- Personal and Professional Development
- Any other student business
- Any other Staff Business - This can include, when relevant, any further quality management items such as external examiners reports that weren’t covered in any other points.

8.3: Organisation:

It is also crucial to think about the organisation of a department staff student committee:

- Where possible there should be two student staff committees, or other forums for discussion for student representation, in departments and faculties each semester. If this is not possible staff should consult with students and the students’ union about how best to ensure that students are still effectively represented. For courses where contact time is heavy, or that involve part-time or distance learning, staff may wish to consider alternative approaches such as online forums to ensure representation continues to happen.
- Participation in meetings should not solely be through attendance at the meeting and staff should encourage a variety of engagement opportunities to ensure the student voice is represented consistently. The students’ union can, when invited, assist staff with this process.
- Agendas should follow the template laid out in 8.2. Additions to this agenda, by students or staff, should be kept to a minimum. Where additional agenda items are added it is the responsibility of staff to collect these and the discretion of the chair whether to accept these items.
- Staff should distribute the finalised agenda a minimum of 7 working days in advance of each meeting.
- The minutes should identify follow up actions required and who is responsible for them. At the next meeting there should be a report on the progress of these actions.
- The ethos of student staff committee meetings is that they are student-led. This means that they should be chaired or co-chaired by a student. In the absence of a student chair, whether it is through lack of attendance or lack of a volunteer, a staff member may chair meetings.
- There should be at least one student representative elected from the departmental student staff committee (SSC) to sit on the departmental learning and teaching committee.

8.4: Record Keeping and Communication:

- A formal record of the meeting should be made. A set of action points and who is responsible would be sufficient.
- Progress against these action points should be followed up at subsequent SSC meetings.
● The record of the meeting should be communicated to all students in the department, e.g: by posting on MOLE.

8.5: Training and Induction:
● It is the responsibility of the department to induct students into the department’s plans and issues related to learning and teaching.
● Suggested topics to cover include: Overview of quality assurance processes, business and discussion from the previous year AND goals of the department for the coming year.
● Opportunities for representation on other departmental committees.
● The students’ union can provide a standard presentation format for this upon request.

8.6: Measuring Impact:
● At the end of each academic year, departmental committees will jointly compose a series of mutually agreed recommendations and commendations for their department. This will present a summation of the student voice for the academic year and will highlight key areas that should be raised throughout the new academic year.
● These recommendations can be compiled externally to a student staff committee meeting or in the final student staff committee meeting of the academic year.
● Departments should utilise these recommendations and commendations to inform the induction of the following year academic representatives.
● Both the recommendations and response should be forwarded to the students’ union at the end of each academic year. The students’ union will monitor the outcomes of student representation in all departments and faculties, and will provide support and advice wherever required by staff or students.

9. Guidance on Faculty Student-Staff Committees (SSC)

Exact faculty representation structures and processes will vary between faculties to best reflect the student makeup of that faculty. Exact structures and approaches will be reviewed and agreed upon annually between learning and teaching services and the students’ union.

They should in principle follow very similar structures and roles to departmental student staff committees (Refer to point 8). Staff in those departments that fall outside the traditional faculty provision should ensure that their department is effectively represented at an institutional level.

10. Publicity for Student Academic Representatives

Efforts should be made to ensure that student academic representatives are promoted to the wider student body within their relevant department or faculty. Guidance on ways in which to promote academic representative activities can be found below:

● All departments should have a well-publicised space on the Virtual Learning Environment where all course and faculty information is stored. This should include contact details for
11. Monitoring and Reviewing of Student Academic Representation

- Department and faculty learning and teaching committees should ensure their corresponding departments and faculties adhere to this Code of Practice on an annual basis.
- It is the role of the academic representation coordinator within the students’ union and the projects and student partnerships manager within academic and learning services to monitor and review this code annually. To support this, the code should also be aligned with the work of the student engagement steering group to ensure continued relevancy with both the institution and sector guidelines (e.g. the QAA Quality Code).

12: Information on Student Union Department Councillors and Sabbatical Officers

The students’ union holds other representative systems within its structure. These are the students’ union council and the elected sabbatical officers. Whilst separate, they can often interact with the academic representative structure on a case by case basis.

**Students’ union council** is the main decision making body in the students’ union. It has the power to make decisions about students’ union policy, to put proposals to referenda and to oversee the work of, and mandate, the sabbatical officers. More information on their roles can be found here through the [student union webpages](https://sheffield.ac.uk).

**Elected Students’ Union sabbatical officers** also offer student representation on higher level
university committees. And will, where relevant, support other representatives. More information on their roles can be found through the student union webpages.

- There are 46 departmental councillors, 9 representative councillors and 8 sabbatical officers that make up the memberships of the students’ union council.
- Departmental Councillors are elected by students in their department each year to represent them in the Students’ Union. Unlike academic representatives, who give students a voice around learning and teaching within their departments or faculties, departmental councilors represent their student groups on wider, university or students’ union based issues that may affect that department or faculty. The role is outward looking, rather than inward looking.
- These individuals will work closely with departments and other academic representation positions and will attend relevant student staff and departmental committee meetings where appropriate.
- The departmental and representative councillors are elected in October of each academic year via a students’ union election. More information on this process can be found through the students’ union webpages.
- Exact election timetables will fluctuate, but departments will be informed of their departmental union Councillor by the end of October.