



How to be an Academic Officer (for a Departmental/Academic Society)

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1. THE ROLE OF THE SOCIETY ACADEMIC OFFICER

Congratulations on being elected as an Academic Officer for your society! This is an important role for departmental and academic societies as it means that you will be pioneering students' educational experience within your society and beyond!

As an **Academic Officer**, your role has three key components:

1. Encouraging students to learn outside of the lecture theatre
2. Working with other experts to help the academic life of your members
3. Supporting the employability of your members.

This guide will provide you with some ideas on how you can best fulfil the role and let you know about all the staff and student support that is available to you – don't worry, you're not alone.

2. ENHANCING ACADEMIC LIFE

After being elected (normally in April/May) your committee will start thinking and planning for the year ahead. It can be useful to have a plan of what you want to achieve (and how) before the summer vacation so you can start the groundwork before September.

As an Academic Officer you need to lead the way on your society's plans in relation to education, but make sure you always consult your committee so that everyone's on-board. You'll need their help in logistical planning and publicising what you're doing. To help you plan from the outset, it can be useful to consider the following questions to give you an idea of what students want and what your society can deliver:

- What has your society done already to improve the academic experience of your members?





- What has your society done to improve the employability of your members?
- How can your society's activities complement your degree?

- How well does your society engage with non-traditional students? (e.g. postgraduates, international students).

Here are some examples of past activities from a few other societies to get you thinking...

Edward Bramley Law's Academic Activities

- Careers Events
- Debating Competitions
- Mooting workshops
- Articles for the *Eagle* magazine

History Society's Academic Activities

- Volunteering at the Heritage Museum
- Careers Talks (with Careers Service)
- Remembrance Week activities
- Historical film nights

Politics Society's Academic Activities

- Trip to Westminster
- Trip to Dublin University
- Film for Thought
- American Election Week

Geography Society's Academic Activities

- GeogSoc promotion in the Geog department Intro Pack
- Helped with Geography department Open Days in exchange for funding for the society
- Newsletter to Geography students celebrating academic achievement and promoting study abroad opportunities
- Richard Twigger talk
- Careers Evening





3. SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

It's possible that in your role as Academic Officer, you might encounter a student who's having problems on, or with, their course. Although it can be helpful for students to talk to you about problems they're encountering, it's important that you know where to signpost them for further professional advice. This section will explain where students can find help from these issues, and who your contacts are:



The Student Advice Centre

The Student Advice Centre exists to help students on academic, housing, immigration issues and lots more:
<http://su.sheffield.ac.uk/advice-support>

- The Advice Centre has lots of experience helping students deal with academic appeals and complaints as well as progress, discipline and fitness to practice issues. Advisers are able to accompany students to University meetings and hearings, & speak on their behalf.
- The team are a huge source of knowledge on university regulations & procedures!

Academic Representation

Academic reps are students who represent the views of students in academic departments and faculties to the University and Students' Union. These students receive training from the SU on how to represent the students in their departments or

faculty. Reps attend Student Staff Committee meetings (SSCs) and report outcomes back to the SU.

It is very important that reps communicate academic issues raised at these meetings back to students and to generally raise awareness among student of issues affecting education. This would be a brilliant opportunity for you and departmental academic reps to work together!

It is important to remember that academic reps have been trained on how to effectively gather student opinions in a representative way and use this to facilitate change within their cohort. Do get in touch with reps if you think you could work together on the academic projects you create for your society.

Here are the students who have academic representative functions:

Academic Reps:

- Student-Staff Committee meetings twice a semester.
- Issues affecting the academic experience in your department.

Faculty Reps:

- Faculty Student-Staff Committee meetings once a semester.
- Issues affecting the academic experience across the faculty.

Attending Student Staff Committee Meetings:

Student Staff Committee meetings also have an open space for a member of the relevant departmental society to attend. Whilst it isn't





necessary for you to attend all SSCs In a year, it may be beneficial to help build relationships and work in partnership with Academic reps and departmental staff.

To attend your Student Staff Committee meeting, it is best to speak to the Staff Co-ordinator of the SSC. You can find out who this is by:

- Requesting this information from your departmental helpdesk/reception.
- Contacting the Students' Union at:
academicreps@sheffield.ac.uk

4. A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF AN ACADEMIC OFFICER

So, what should a year in the life of an Academic Officer look like?

April/May:

Get elected
Attend relevant SU training

Summer:

Plan for the year ahead

September:

Orientation Week
Intro Pack?
Intro Week – the unofficial freshers' induction? Departmental welcome talks?
Buying books: help your members?

October:

Academic rep elections: Build alliances: contact reps (see Section 3)
Students' Union Council elections

First SSC meeting (Student Staff Committee)
NSS results (National Student Survey)

November:

Guest speakers?
Films related to this semester's modules?
Study abroad talks?

December:

Exam preparation
Departmental Careers Fair? (lots of Graduate Schemes have January deadlines)

January:

Exams

February:

New ERASMUS students
Study trip?
Students' Union Officer elections

March:

SSC (Student Staff Committee)
Feedback from Semester 1

April:

Module choice?
Society Election Fortnight
Exam preparation
Research showcase!
Apply for Activities Awards & Academic Awards (e.g. Departmental Society of the Year; Enterprise Award)





Top Tips

- Find a staff ally in your department
- Arrange a coffee with your Head of Department, Academic Reps
- Attend an SSC and don't be afraid to input
- Promote your department's activity and they'll promote yours
- Give students opportunities!

The Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR):

SU HEAR Coordinator:
m.chilton@sheffield.ac.uk

5. FURTHER HELP AND GUIDANCE

There is loads of help and guidance to help you through your role – don't be afraid to ask!

For help on...

Organising your activities & events or general society queries:

Activities & Sports Zone:
activities@sheffield.ac.uk

Tim, Society Coordinator:
society.coordinator@sheffield.ac.uk

Contacting your Academic Reps:

Scott, Academic Co-ordinator:
scott.dawson@sheffield.ac.uk

SU Education Officer:
education.officer@sheffield.ac.uk

Academic issues (or other student problems):

Student Advice Centre:
advice@sheffield.ac.uk

