Department Guidance on Supporting Academic Representation at the University of Sheffield

Introduction

To be effective, student Academic Representation needs to be facilitated by departmental staff, working in partnership with Academic Representatives and Students’ Union staff. Departmental staff play a pivotal role in ensuring that the student voice is heard wherever decisions are taken about learning and teaching.

Below you will find a suggested structure for the development of academic representation within departments and the remits that exist within this. We have also included the department specific aspects of the Benchmarking Toolkit to help contextualise the remit of staff within this process.

Any questions regarding the departmental guidance can be sent to the Academic Representation Co-ordinator at: scott.dawson@sheffield.ac.uk

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1. Departmental Student Academic Representation Coordinator(s)

Departments will nominate one or several Departmental Student Academic Representation Co-ordinator(s) to act as a first point of contact for Student Academic Representation. These staff are expected to work in partnership and with the support of departmental academic and professional colleagues, SU colleagues and academic representatives to facilitate Student Academic Representation.

We recognise that the approach to facilitating academic representation in department staff teams will vary locally. However, where this work is not assigned to one or several staff members, there should still be a clear line of responsibility at departmental level for ensuring that the student voice shapes learning and teaching.

2. Core responsibilities for facilitating effective Student Academic Representation:

Staff working in this area should draw on the University Map for Student Engagement and the Students’ Union Benchmarking Toolkit to inform their support of Academic Representation. The following provides an outline for key priorities that should be met.

2a.) Overseeing the recruitment of Student Academic Representatives

• To ensure that all students have an Academic Representative from their programme and level of study.

2b.) When overseeing recruitment

• Liaise with the Students’ Union and ensure that information about Academic Representation is communicated between members of departmental staff, such as DLT, Programme lead, Teaching Staff and Administrators.

• Follow guidelines about the recruitment of Academic Representatives to ensure that students are encouraged to volunteer through an informal, non-competitive process, according to the agreed timeline, shared separately.

• Ensure that information about the recruitment of Academic Representatives is effectively communicated to students. Remind colleagues that Academic Representation roles should be promoted in areas such as welcome talks.

• Arrange an appropriate Departmental induction for Student Academic Reps.
Maintain communication with the Students’ Union Academic Coordinator and Students’ Union Academic Rep Facilitator Team throughout the process so that any issues or support required can be provided to you.

2c.) Oversee the effective function of Departmental Student Staff Committees (SSCs)

- Ensure that SSCs have a defined constitution and remit.
- Ensure that SSCs meet at least twice each teaching semester at appropriate times to influence Departmental learning and teaching decision-making.
- Ensure that SSCs nominate representatives to key Department decision-making bodies.
- Ensure that SSCs elect a student representative(s) to Faculty Staff Student Committee and students (FSSCs). Support Department SSCs in recognising issues of wider relevance and feeding forward to Faculty SSCs.

2d.) Ensure student academic representatives are properly inducted and supported to play an active role in Departmental decision-making

- Share information appropriately and hold guidance/briefings so that student Academic Representatives can play a role as valued members of Learning and Teaching Committee, Programme Committee and other working groups.

2e.) Ensure that Student Academic Representatives are supported to communicate with each other and their peers

- e.g. face to face, by email, or via a dedicated Google site or MOLE site. The SU can provide guidance on this as required.

2f.) Encourage and influence colleagues to help the student voice shape departmental decision-making

- e.g. programme leads, teaching colleagues, relevant working-groups, DLTs
3. Resource Commitment

Staff Academic Representation Coordinators and other colleagues whose role is to foster student engagement have access to expertise, resources and support via the Students’ Union Academic Representation Co-ordinator and the Academic Rep Facilitator Team.

Departments are encouraged to reflect a commitment to student engagement comparable to equivalent academic priorities in their allocation of workload. Where the student voice is effectively represented and heard, the responsibilities involved in facilitating effective student academic representation are likely to be shared by a number of academic and professional staff; so there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

4. Departmental Benchmarking Information

The following is an overview of what have been agreed between the University and Students’ Union as minimum expectations for supporting Academic Representation within a department. This is not prescriptive and should help departments reflect on how best they can support Academic Representation within their own local context.

Full details, including examples of good and excellent practice can be found within the Academic Representation Benchmarking Toolkit.

Overview

• HoDs appoint a Departmental Student Academic Representation Coordinator(s) or similar to act as a first point of contact for Student Academic Representation.

• Information and publicity about the Academic Rep scheme is communicated to relevant members of departmental staff (DLT, programme leads, teaching staff, administrators).

• SSCs have student representation for relevant years and programmes of study. All students must have an Academic Representative from their programme and level of study, with a general expectation on all but the smallest programmes of at least 2 per level group.

• The challenges of recruiting and managing academic representation programmes are recognised within this process.

• SSCs have a locally agreed constitution and defined remit that supports effective academic representation in line with examples of good practice.

• SSCs meet at least twice in each academic semester at appropriate times to ensure effective academic representation in Departmental learning and teaching governance.
• Programme leads and teaching teams support effective student representation.

• Evidence/information about the effectiveness of academic representation is disseminated regularly.

• Students are represented on Departmental Learning and Teaching Committees.

Recruitment

• Departments promote Academic Representative through means such as welcome talks/emails for new incoming L1 and postgraduate students and in Semester 2 for other level groups.

• Academic Rep recruitment is coordinated by programme staff according to the appointment schedule (Semester 1 for L1 and postgrad; Semester 2 for the following session for other level groups).

• Students are encouraged to volunteer for the role through informal non-competitive processes that encourage diversity in representation.

Support & Training

• Academic Representatives are given the schedule/timeline for training provided by SU.

• SU provides training promptly following recruitment, and prior to first committee meetings.

• Academic Representatives are provided with Departmental induction (e.g. through e-mail or at first SSC meeting).

• Academic Representatives are encouraged to network with each other through e-mail before first SSC meeting.

• The Students’ Union Academic Representation Facilitator Team will also support academic representatives directly with advice and guidance.
Communication and Resources

- Departments promote role to students through regular communication on Departmental social media, MOLE and pre-arranged time slots in core lectures.

- Departments provide standard tools for students to communicate with Academic Representatives and for them to communicate with students (e.g. historyreps@sheffield.ac.uk and student mailing lists).

- Academic Representatives are provided with a schedule/timeline for departmental meetings.

- Committee meeting agendas and previous minutes are shared at least a week in advance.

- Correspondence between Departments and Academic Representatives is maintained beyond formal committee meetings.

- Departments share local data with Academic Representatives from sources such as NSS and periodic reviews.

- Achievements of Academic Representatives are shared through ‘you said, we did’ initiatives or similar.

Partnerships

- Academic Representatives are seen as a key aspect of departmental structures; the student voice is engaged and valued in learning and teaching quality enhancement and programme/curriculum change.

- The student voice is respected equally to that of staff and valued appropriately.

- SSC meetings are chaired by a rep or co-chaired alongside Staff.

Impact

- A brief annual report on work undertaken by SSCs and FSSCs is co-created by Academic Representatives and staff for communication to new Academic Representatives.

- Academic Representatives reflect on their engagement and how it can be improved and achievements and how this contributes to their personal development.