

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Principles and Guidelines for Student Academic Representation

Introduction

The Student Academic Representation system is a partnership between the University and Lancaster University Students' Union (LUSU).

In working together, the Students' Union and the University can deliver effective, meaningful change that benefits all partners in our learning community.

As greater emphasis across the Higher Education sector is placed upon student satisfaction, this paper outlines how a clear set of principles and guidelines for a well-resourced Academic Representation system can contribute towards achieving clear mechanisms and pathways for feedback on the student experience. It also works towards setting out the ways in which staff can reciprocate by facilitating discussion and feedback on issues as they arise. Likewise, an effective system of feedback will work both ways; it should allow Academic Representatives to work as a point of contact for the University to disseminate information and outcomes regarding previously submitted feedback amongst their peers.

Purpose

This document sets out the joint commitments of the University and the Students' Union to ensure that the Student Academic Representation Systems provides both quality assurance and enhancement in the student educational experience. It should be used to direct University staff, the Students' Union and Student Academic Representatives in relation to the principles, expectations and mechanisms under which all parties should operate. However this is not intended to be restrictive or prohibitive of the development of localised practices for departments and faculties.

The principles and guidelines laid out in the documents are applicable for all students who receive tuition from Lancaster University via the Bailrigg site e.g. full-time, part-time, UG, PG, distance learners. This document does not apply to those students receiving tuition at overseas partnership institutions, where individual localised provisions for student academic representation will apply.

1. *Representation within Lancaster University Structures*

- 1.1 Student Academic Representatives should have the opportunity to feed into developments affecting the student experience at a programme/discipline, department, faculty and institutional level.
- 1.2 Departments and Faculties should be fully engaged in the student academic representation system with clear leadership, formal processes and engagement with Student Academic Representatives and the Students' Union.

- 1.3 Representation at Faculty level will be via the Faculty Representatives, with one representatives per faculty being elected for each of the following cohorts:
- (i) Undergraduate Students
 - (ii) Postgraduate Taught Students
 - (iii) Postgraduate Research Students
- 1.4 All programmes in a department should normally have elected student academic representatives. When considering how many representatives to elect, Departments should consider:
- (i) programme or discipline areas;
 - (ii) the number of students in a cohort;
 - (iii) the mode of study for the course;
 - (iv) the potential workload for student representatives;
 - (v) student's ability to know who their representative is;
 - (vi) how easy it will be for representatives and students to contact each other.
- 1.5 The recommended ratio of academic reps per year for departments is:
- 0-50 students – 1 representative
 - 51-100 students – 2 representatives
 - 101-150 students – 3 representatives
 - 151+ students – 4 representatives
- 1.6 Formal mechanisms should be in place within departments to allow academic representatives the opportunity to raise feedback/issues directly with relevant members of staff. These mechanisms should normally take the format of a staff-student committee (or equivalent) however academic representatives should be encouraged to raise issues informally with members of staff outside of formal meetings, especially when formal meeting schedules don't permit the timely raising of feedback.
- 1.7 Department and Faculties should appoint a member(s) of staff who will act as the primary point of contact for academic representatives in their department/faculty.
- 1.8 Whilst working in partnership, it is recognised that Academic Representatives are representatives first-and-foremost of their peers on their programme. As such they should be able, permitted and expected to raise the concerns of their peers in an open manner, free of concern that their doing so should affect their standing with their Faculty, Department or Programme.
- 1.9 The University and Students' Union will endeavour to ensure that appropriate resources and support are in place to facilitate the system.
- 1.10 The Student Academic Representation system will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Students' Union and the University through a Student Academic Representation Advisory Group, chaired by the Students' Union Vice President

(Education), who will meet once a year to monitor the effectiveness of the student academic representation system within the University and make recommendations for its enhancement and development.

2. *Elections*

- 2.1 In the interests of fairness, academic representatives should be elected on an annual basis by their peers and all students should have the opportunity to stand as a representative.
- 2.2 Departmental Student Academic Representatives should be elected at the beginning of the academic year, ideally by the end of week 3 of Michaelmas Term and their details sent to the Students' Union to enable timely training. Special provisions will be taken into account for appropriate groups of students (e.g. distance learners). These elections should be held in accordance with guidelines issued by the Students' Union.
- 2.3 Faculty Academic Representatives will be elected annually by the Students' Union in a faculty-based ballot, which will be governed by LUSU's Constitution and Bye-laws.

3. *Academic Representatives*

- 3.1 Student Academic Representatives should be proactive in their roles; this includes the need to maintain dialogue with their peers, being representative of their cohort, ensuring they are fully prepared for meetings and fully engaging with the University on matters relating to the student experience.
- 3.2 There will be an agreed set of expectations regarding Departmental Academic Representatives roles and responsibilities which will be reviewed on an annual basis. These can be found in Appendix 1 of this document.
- 3.3 The roles and expectations of Faculty Academic Representatives will be laid out and governed through the LUSU Constitution and Bye-Laws.

4. *Staff-Student Committee Structures*

- 4.1 The size and structure of a department will determine the structure of a staff-student committee (SSC). The following are provided as examples of good practice.
 - (i) It may be appropriate for one SSC to exist at a departmental level.
 - (ii) In large departments it may be appropriate to hold multiple SSCs administered at an individual programme/discipline level or via student type/year of study.

- (iii) In departments with significant numbers of part-time students/distance learners/placement students an appropriate discussion group, for example held electronically, should be established to facilitate the discussion of issues.
- 4.2 It is recommended that SSCs should follow a clear linear path providing a formal route for feedback from students to departments, faculties and the university, and also a route for consultation and communication with the student body.
- 4.3 SSCs (or equivalent formal meeting) should ideally meet at least twice a term, with the first of these meetings ordinarily taking place no later than week 4 of term.
- 4.4 It is recommended that where appropriate and numbers permit, that a separate Postgraduate Research SSC be held to ensure that Postgraduate Research student's representation needs are met while reducing the conflicts of interest related to postgraduate students who teach within departments. In cases where a department has only a small number of postgraduate research students, it may be appropriate for one or more student representatives to attend the Department Committee or an equivalent meeting with responsibility for postgraduate research provision.

5. *Reporting*

- 5.1 SSCs should provide their minutes to their relevant Department Committee (or equivalent meeting) and where appropriate the chair of the committee should be permitted to provide a written/verbal report on any business discussed.
- 5.2 In instances where issues arise outside of SSCs and require immediate consideration and action, the department should ensure that any resulting action is reported back to the relevant SSC.
- 5.3 There should be student representation on Faculty Teaching Committees (or equivalent). It will be the responsibility of the elected LUSU Faculty Representatives to attend these meetings and feed in views from the Students' Union Faculty Forums.
- 5.4 Faculty Teaching Committees (or equivalent) will receive an annual report from their respective faculty student representatives in the summer term of the academic year, which will include a summary of issues considered by the Students' Union Faculty Forums.
- 5.5 The Students' Union will organise a minimum of two Faculty Forums a term at which it is expected that all student academic representatives should attend in order to raise and discuss matters affecting students of that faculty. These forums will be chaired by the respective faculty representatives.

6. *Training*

- 6.1 The Students' Union will be responsible for centrally co-ordinating training for academic representatives to ensure that they are able to be successful in their roles. It is expected that all representatives undertake and engage with the appropriate training required for their roles. For programmes with significant numbers of part-time students/distance learners/placement students, online training provisions will be made available.
- 6.2 Student Representatives taking on additional specialist duties will be provided with additional training opportunities, these will be delivered by the Students' Union and/or the University, as appropriate.
- 6.3 The Students' Union will provide information regarding how to access training to academic representatives and departments and it is expected that departments will help promote the training within their areas.

7. *Communications and Support*

- 7.1 The Students' Union, departments and faculties will ensure that academic representatives are informed in advance about relevant meetings and provided with agendas where appropriate, so that they can effectively collect the students' views on issues raised.
- 7.2 Departments/Faculties should be expected to provide documentation to academic representatives when requested, such as previous agendas, minutes etc..., with the exception of any issues relating to confidential staff or student matters.
- 7.3 Departments/Faculties and the Students' Union, will both facilitate the promotion of their representatives via access/space on websites, student portal and to departmental email lists.
- 7.4 The University and the Students' Union will work in collaboration to respond to feedback from students in order to enhance the quality of the educational experience for all students. As far as is reasonably practical, issues arising from feedback will be resolved in as timely a manner as possible and students kept informed of developments at all stages.
- 7.5 Departments will provide LUSU with up to date information on:
 - representatives' names and details;
 - any changes made mid-session;
 - feedback regarding consistent non-attendance of representatives at meetings;
 - notice of any meetings scheduled to run before training events so interim support could be offered.

7.6 LUSU will provide departments/faculties with up to date information on:

- activities and support provision for academic representatives;
- any changes likely to impact on governance structures in a timely manner.

8. *Recognising Student Engagement in Academic Representation*

8.1 LUSU will co-ordinate an accreditation scheme for student academic representatives, which upon the successful completion will be officially recorded on a student's degree transcript.

APPENDIX 1:

Roles and Responsibilities of Departmental Student Academic Representatives

Role Description

The primary role of a Departmental Academic Rep is to collate and feedback the views of the students they are elected to represent to both the University and Students' Union. During the year you will meet with other Academic Representatives and staff within departments, discuss any issues and changes affecting students, and then ensure that outcomes and any actions and developments are fed back to students on their course.

Term of Office

One academic year based on your programme.

Time Commitment

You must engage with Academic Representative Training and attend Departmental Staff-Student Committees and Students' Union Faculty Forum meetings. How long you spend on your role depends on your time available and the needs of those you represent.

Core Responsibilities

- Seek out the views and opinions of all students of on your course on matters affecting their educational experiences, using a variety of different communication methods.
- Liaise with other Reps to gain support and share thoughts and ideas.
- Engage with and represent the views and opinions of students on your course in the first instance by attending Departmental Staff-Student Committees and other meetings as appropriate.
- Feedback and discuss issues raised at Staff-Student Committees with your fellow students.
- To attend Students' Union Faculty Forums and bring unresolved or higher level issues to these meetings.

- To engage with training to ensure you are prepared to successfully undertake your role.
- Promote yourself and your role effectively to students on your course, ensuring that they are aware of the support you offer.
- It is not your responsibility to deal with individual and personal issues. Students should be directed to their academic tutors, LUSU Advice & Support or University Student Support Services.

Further Opportunities

Rep Development Scheme – The Students' Union offers a free development scheme to Academic Representatives to help develop skills, increase employability and improve the quality of the feedback from students to the University. Each level must be fulfilled before moving to the next and will be awarded pending the completion of the 'Reps Exit Survey' in the Summer Term. The Bronze Training is compulsory for all Academic Reps in order to have the role recorded on University transcripts. In addition the Students' Union also offers Silver and Gold level accreditation.