

The University of Manchester

Student Academic Representation Policy and Guidelines

1. Introduction

This document clarifies the valuable role of student academic representation within the University, defines the role of Student Academic Representative and sets out the support provided to representatives by the University and the Students' Union.

The guidelines set out minimum expectations for student academic representation that each School or Faculty can then develop to suit their specific needs. Each School and Faculty must, however, ensure that sufficient methods of student representation are available.

The document covers all students. However, some areas will require adaptations to suit the specific needs of particular types of programmes and levels of study.

2. The Importance of Student Academic Representation

Students form the heart of the University. The University of Manchester is committed to receiving and responding to student feedback in order to bring about improvement in the quality of the student experience and development of learning and teaching within the institution. The core principle is that all students should have the opportunity to contribute to and enhance their experience whilst studying at the University of Manchester.

3. Definition of Student Academic Representation

Student representation covers a diverse range of activities and structures and student feedback can be provided by a number of different means, for example, through programme evaluation questionnaires, the personal tutorial system or through students being present at Staff-Student Liaison Committees or Programme Committees. Representation enables dialogue between students and staff in order to aid development of programmes of study, the student experience and the quality of the institution as a whole. This dialogue can take place in both formal and informal structures and circumstances.

Student Academic Representatives (Reps) will be defined in this document as those students on a particular programme of study who have been chosen by their peers to represent the interests of their peer group on Programme Committees,

Staff-Student Liaison Committees, other School or Faculty committees, Students' Union Council or other appropriate groups.

4. The Role of Student Academic Representatives

The main responsibilities of the Student Academic Representative are:-

- i. To be an advocate of particular students or groups of students where necessary
- ii. To provide feedback on various aspects of the University and the student experience both to the University and to the student body
- iii. To take an active role in planning and decision making

As we move towards the centre of the University, student representation becomes more independent. While programme level representation is primarily organised within the programme or School, School reps are elected by their school via Union Council Elections (usually in March with a by-election in October). Faculty Officers sit on the Union Executive and have full access to all Union Resources while continuing their studies, and the Academic Affairs Officer is a full-time sabbatical resourced by the Union.

5. The Relationship between University, Students' Union and Representative Structures

Relationship between University, Students' Union and Representative Structures		
University Level	Appropriate Representative	Students' Union Role
University	Academic Affairs Officer	Executive
Faculties	Faculty Officers	
Schools	Schools Reps	Council
Programmes	Programme Reps	Elect Council and Executive, set policy at General Meetings
The General Student Population		

The table above shows where individual representatives work within both the University and the Students' Union. Starting from the bottom, the General Student Population can participate in all democratic structures of the Union and studies in the University. Programme reps are involved in their school at a programme level and can similarly be involved in the same Union processes as the general student population. School reps work at a school-wide level in the University and sit on the Union Council. Likewise Faculty Officers take part in faculty-wide activities and are on the Union Executive. Finally, the Academic Affairs Officer's remit is throughout the University and he or she is a sabbatical officer on the Union Executive.

6 The Underlying Principles of Student Representation

- i. There should be forums which enable discussion between students and staff at each of the following levels and which are suitable to the particular structures inherent within the levels:-
 - Programme or Discipline
 - School
 - Faculty
 - University
- ii. All students should be able to contribute to and enhance their experience while studying at the University. All students should have an opportunity to become a Student Representative to represent their programme, discipline, School or Faculty.
- iii. There should be a democratic process to select student representatives. This is outlined in Appendix 1 – Guide to the Election of Student Representatives.
- iv. Student Representatives should always be invited to relevant meetings. If a student representative is unable to be present, the Chair should feedback information to the rep by use of email, etc. If the Chair is aware that a rep is unable to attend a meeting which has specific student matters are on the agenda, the Chair may wish to contact the student rep prior to the meeting to request any comments or suggest sending an alternative rep in their place.
- v. All Schools should assign a member of staff to act as Student Representation Co-ordinator to be the first point of contact for students and representatives on representation issues and to co-ordinate student representation within the School. (A 'role description' for Student Representation Co-ordinators is available from the Students' Union Academic Affairs Officer, from the University Academic Quality office or at <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/tlao/quality/studentrepresentation/>).
- vi. There should be a method of encouraging co-operation and interaction between the various Student Representatives and Student Representative Co-ordinators. For example, Co-ordinators could be involved in running representative training with the Students' Union; Student Representatives could meet to discuss common issues; and Co-ordinators could have a forum to be able to identify good practice, provide mutual support, etc.

- vii. Particular consideration should be given to those students who are either part-time, postgraduate students, on multidisciplinary programmes or away from their normal place of study on placements. Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that these particular students have access to representation structures. Meetings should be planned at times/dates which would not unduly prevent these particular students from attending.

7. Responsibilities of University staff

- i. Administration and co-ordination of student representation processes is shared jointly between the University and the Students' Union, with both parties contributing to the development of documentation, guidance, recruitment and training. The Teaching and Learning Support Office co-ordinates the Student Representation Co-ordinators' forum, which usually meets three times a year.
- ii. School/Faculty staff should ensure that open, fair elections are organised where appropriate (see Appendix 1), with all students having an equal opportunity to put themselves forward to become representatives.
- iii. The School should provide the following to Student Representatives:-
- a notice board within the School
 - specific information on the committee/body that they are a member of
 - adequate notice of meeting dates and ensure that relevant papers are distributed to Student Representatives
 - the support of a Student Representation Co-ordinator within the School
 - information on other sources of support available, such as the Students' Union

8. Responsibilities of the Students' Union

The Students' Union provides the following:-

- general information on student representation within the University
- training in areas such as committee skills
- further training opportunities including the Certificate of Personal Development and specialised advice training
- the opportunity to attend meetings organised by the Union specifically for student representatives
- access to Students' Union Officers for additional support
- a drop-in advice service

NB Union elections are governed by the Students' Union's own procedures. Election regulations can be found in Schedule F of the Union Constitution (see <http://www.umsu.manchester.ac.uk>).

9. The Role of a Programme Representative

The main duties include to:-

- liaise between students and staff on matters of mutual interest or concern
- attend Staff-Student Liaison Committee, Programme Committee or other relevant meetings
- voice student views to University staff involved in programmes
- provide two-way feedback on the quality of units, programmes and teaching
- provide advice and information to students or refer them to the Students' Union or other areas of the University in cases of specialised or more complex issues
- promote active student involvement in the development of programmes

A full "Job Description" can be seen in Appendix 2 – Programme Representative Job Description.

Appendix 1 – Guide To Election of Student Representatives

1. Introduction

Union elections are covered by the Students' Union's own procedures; election regulations are found in Schedule F of the Union Constitution (see <http://www.umsu.manchester.ac.uk>).

Student Representatives are students who are chosen by their peers to act as the representative for their particular Programme, School or Faculty. They act as a formal channel of communication between the students they represent and the University staff involved in their Programme, School or Faculty.

Representatives should be provided for all taught programmes of study, but for economy one representative could cover a cluster of small programmes. Representatives should be provided for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, for research students, and for students with different modes of study including part-time, placement and distance learning.

Student Representatives should be appointed as soon as possible after the start of a new academic year, ideally no later than the fourth week of the semester or by the time of the first Programme Committee / Staff-Student Liaison meeting, etc. If practical, reps from the previous year's first and second year student body should be selected prior to the summer term to enable them to take up their role immediately at the start of the next academic year.

2. Numbers of Representatives

Where practical, on each Programme there should be at least one Student Representative for each year of study. The number of Student Representatives on School Staff-Student Liaison Committees or various Faculty Committees would depend upon the size of the School or Faculty.

3. Initial Information Given to Students

Students should first be made aware of the roles, responsibilities and resources of representatives along with information on the place and time of election. This information should not be given at the same time as when the election is to take place, and should ideally take the form of something written or a web-reference. Students should also be directed to www.umsu.manchester.ac.uk to find out about wider representation and minimum standards.

3. Election Process

Students who would like to put themselves forward should make themselves known preferably in advance of the day of the election.

On the day of the election, each candidate should be given an opportunity to speak to his or her peers. Each candidate should be given an equal amount of time and reasonable access to audio equipment where necessary. The ballot can be conducted either by a show of hands or by a secret ballot.

Once the representative(s) has been elected the students present should be informed about where their contact information will be and reminded of the representative's role.

4. Equal Opportunities

All students must have an equal opportunity to put themselves forward to become representatives. This requires effective communication in all appropriate media, fair timing and placement of the election, provision of appropriate facilities for public speaking and conveyance of information, and absolutely no discrimination on any grounds by those overseeing the election.

The entire process must also be effectively and accurately communicated from the outset.

5. Low Participation / Difficulties in Using Elections for Selection

Low levels of participation and interest can be a problem. The best way to combat this is by genuinely respecting and utilising student representatives and thus enhancing their value and role.

The Student Representative Job Description also outlines the role and shows the skills and opportunities that the role provides.

It is envisaged that elections will form the basis of selecting students to act as representatives as this method allows for equality of opportunity for all students. However, there are cases where elections are impractical, perhaps due to small numbers of students or exceptionally high numbers. In these cases, an alternative method of fair selection may be used, as long as all students have the same opportunities to become representatives if they so wish. For example, when only one or two volunteers come forward, they may be appointed. Some Schools have developed more informal consensual systems which are strongly supported by their students.

Appendix 2 - Programme Representative Job Description

Purpose

- To voice student views to university staff involved in programmes
- To provide student involvement in development and planning of programmes
- To represent students at the level closest to students

Main Responsibilities

- To attend Staff-Student Liaison Committee or other relevant committee meetings
- To be available to listen to fellow students' views, concerns and academic issues
- To feedback results of representations to fellow students
- To liaise with other student representatives both around the university and in the Students' Union

Skills Development

Student Representatives will need, and will develop, the following skills:

- Active listening
- Clear presentation
- Diplomacy
- Assertiveness

Main Contacts

- Student Representation Co-ordinator
- Programme Director
- School Administration
- Students' Union Academic Affairs Officer and Faculty Officer

- Other Student Representatives
- Students on your programme

Resources

Student Representatives will have the following resources available to them:

- Notice board with contact details and photograph in their school
- Timetabled time to meet students face-to-face.
- Students' Union Logbook system
- Access to Students' Union Officers and School Representative for additional support and assurance of provision of the above resources.

Training

Training will be provided by the Students' Union at the beginning of every academic year. It will be provided at a set time for each school. All Programme Representatives should go to this, but may attend a different school's training if their own is inconvenient.

Benefits

- CV enhancement
- Chance to improve academic standards and teaching that you experience
- Training and skills development
- Networking
- Potential references from University and Students' Union