



Student Voice (Student Representation) Policy

Authors:	Quality and Academic Development
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Student Voice (Student Representation) Policy

Aim

Students have a crucial role within the University, and this policy outlines how the University endeavours to make students co-owners of their education. This is achieved through equitable membership of University decision-making structures, working in partnership with the University and the Students' Union. Students will be full members of these structures, with appropriate support to enable full participation, and will be expected to engage with them proactively.

At the University of Essex, the views, ideas and feedback of our students are at the heart of what the University does. The time students take to offer feedback is hugely appreciated. This feedback, both positive and developmental, is used to help make short and longer term improvements, both to the experience of current students, but also for Essex students of the future.



Overview

This policy sets out the University's approach, in conjunction with the SU, to the management and oversight of the Student-led Representative system, including the purpose of each level, of the Student Representative system from Student Reps to the Executive Committee of the SU, and the responsibilities of all key stakeholders for the effective management of the system.

Student Reps are part of the first and largest tier of the representation system provided by the SU and the University of Essex. Student Reps feedback directly to University staff on academic issues, typically through Student Voice Groups (SVG's), and mid-term module feedback.

SU Elected Officers and trained representatives ensure that the University maintains its commitment to the assurance and enhancement of its education provision and the promotion and protection of student interests. This is achieved through membership of appropriate committees, working groups and provision of accurate feedback to the University. This allows for co-ownership of the University between students and staff.

Within this document:

Department – refers to all academic departments, schools and centres at the University

DLR – Department Lead Reps

SVG – Student Voice Group

Student Reps – refers to all student representative roles set out in this policy

SU – Students' Union. A representative body as defined by the 1994 Education Act Part 2 representing the generality of students at an establishment.

Students – refers to all types of student learner at the University including students on apprenticeship programmes and short-course Continuing Professional Development (CPD) modules.

1. Student Representation activity and timeline

The timing of student representation activities, including training and appointment to roles, makes sure the system works effectively, allowing improvements to be made as quickly as possible and aligning with the ongoing cycle of improvement.

Responsibility	Summary of Action	Timescale
Students' Union	Student Representatives recruited and trained. List of trained representatives sent to departments and faculty staff. This process will be repeated at key points during the year until a target of one student rep to fifty students is achieved.	October
Academic Staff/ Student Representatives/Students	Gathering phase of mid-term module feedback	October
Academic Staff/Department Lead Representative	First round of SVG Meetings	November
Students' Union	Student Representatives recruited and trained (including from January starter cohort). Updated lists of reps sent to relevant departments and faculty staff.	January
Students' Union	Election of DLRs and Faculty Representatives	January
Academic Staff/ Student Representatives/Students	Gathering phase of mid-term module feedback	February
Academic Staff/Department Lead Representative	Second round of SVG Meetings	February
Academic Staff/Department Lead Representative	Collection of Feedback	March

Responsibility	Summary of Action	Timescale
Academic Staff/Department Lead Representative	Third round of SVG meetings	First three weeks of Summer Term (Postgraduate SVGs may take place outside of this window)
Students' Union	Collection of Feedback	May
Students' Union	Preparation of submission for Departmental annual plans	June
Students' Union	Student Representative Awards	June

2. Guiding Principles of the Student-led system

The Student Representation system is built on the key principle of partnership between the students, Students' Union and the University.

The Students' Union is the legitimate representative independent body for students individually and collectively for the advancement of student interest at the University of Essex.

2.1 Representation

Representative processes will define the view of the student community. By talking and listening to students, Student Reps will gather collective views to present to the University and the SU, without making assumptions about student opinion and/or experience. This a great opportunity for Reps to develop their advocacy skills.

2.2 Feedback

Both consultative and representative methods will be used to exchange feedback between the student body and the University. Consultative methods engage the student community in broad reflective quantitative and/or qualitative feedback. Departments should proactively work to ensure students are informed of changes that have been made as a result of student feedback, and if changes have not been accommodated, the reasons why communicated. The University and SU are committed to the same practice.

2.3 Communication

Departments and Student Reps will use a variety of methods to update the student community, such as through social media, student emails, departmental notice boards, and the SU website.

2.4 Engagement

Student Reps should act as the link between the wider student body, SU, Academic Departments and the University. Student Reps should promote the different University and SU student feedback mechanisms and have a good working knowledge of the support structure available to students. It is important that Student Reps engage with any University of SU representation and democracy activities. Departments should play an active role in Student Voice reviews and consultations on all student feedback mechanisms. The SU and wider University community are responsible for the same actions.

University departments and the SU Education team should work collaboratively to create an environment that encourages reps to be able to share honest feedback.

2.5 Signposting

Student Reps may be the first point of contact for students with issues, concerns or general enquires, therefore they must be aware of general departmental, University and SU information to signpost students to appropriate areas (especially when dealing with personal queries).

2.6 Sustainability

Student Reps must maintain an effective and sustainable representation system by promoting themselves and their role for the entire academic year. The SU, in collaboration with departments, will widely publicise both the details of what being a Student Rep entails, and the opportunity to become a Student Rep, throughout each academic year to engage more students in representation and impact.

2.7 Co-production

Student Reps should act as 'co-producers' of their own education, reacting to their learning environment and co-defining issues before proactively co-producing solutions with the University and the SU. This could be through informal discussions, sub-committees, working groups, SVGs or Student Parliament and might also involve working with departmental and faculty structures or working directly with other committees and groups in the institution.

2.8 Accountability

Student Reps will be accountable to the students they have been chosen to represent and the SU as a whole. They have the responsibility to act in accordance with the Code of Conduct and adhere to the guiding principles within this document.

3. Roles and Responsibilities of the SU and Essex Partnership

The Students' Union, University and its academic departments value the representation of students at all levels of the University to ensure that the University works in the best interest of students. Information Student Representatives provide through representative structures feed into the University and Students' Union decision-making structures to enable discussion of key issues at higher levels within both bodies.

Welcoming and valuing student feedback

Creating the opportunities and developing the skills for effective student representation

3.1 The University and its Academic Departments will:	3.2 The SU will:
<p>a. Provide the opportunity for all students to participate as full members of appropriate decision-making structures of the University with SU-led staff support.</p> <p>b. Be approachable and receptive to the views of Student Reps and encourage appropriate action in response to student feedback.</p> <p>c. Invite the SU to appropriate departmental and course review meetings to ensure participation by the relevant Student Reps.</p> <p>d. Advise the SU of the academic programme for the year in order that the SU can ensure student reps take responsibility for each module.</p>	<p>a. Provide an induction training session in collaboration with the University and Departments at appropriate points in the year.</p> <p>b. Provide additional opportunities for training, including advice on structure, policy and procedures, to enable Student Reps to continually develop and participate effectively.</p> <p>c. Provide suitable materials through digital media to assist Student Reps in the execution of their duties.</p> <p>d. Provide appropriate financial support to sabbatical officers and Student Reps for costs incurred in participation in the Student Rep system.¹</p> <p>e. Work with the University to ensure students receive recognition for their work as a Student Rep.</p>

¹ The SU will provide appropriate financial support to enable full participation of sabbatical officers as outlined in the SU constitution and will compensate other Student Reps where this has been agreed in advance for costs incurred in their participation in the Student Rep system.

Enabling effective representation

Providing the information and ongoing support to ensure students are actively engaged and involved.

3.3 The University and its Academic Departments will:	3.4 The SU will:
<p>a. Provide the SU with the necessary information to participate in all appropriate decision-making structures, including meeting times, dates and agendas.</p> <p>b. Give Student Reps and the SU timely notice of SVG meetings and widely publicise SVGs to students, to allow students to feed back to Student Reps, Reps to gather views and feed in effectively and maximise attendance at SVGs.</p>	<p>a. Provide Student Reps to attend appropriate meetings, committees and working groups.</p> <p>b. Provide support for Student Reps whilst in attendance at meetings.</p> <p>c. Co-ordinate Student Reps, when appropriate, to assist in canvassing opinion on academic issues which may be affecting a wider range of students across departments, the faculty or University as a whole.</p>

Responding positively and giving feedback

Making sure feedback is considered and any actions and decisions shared with students.

3.5 The University and its Academic Departments will:	3.6 The SU will:
<p>a. Ensure that actions and outcomes arising from student feedback is circulated, as a minimum to Student Reps, when actions are closed, or outcomes resolved.</p> <p>b. Aid Student Reps with publicising any actions and/or decisions to students.</p>	<p>a. Support students in communicating outcomes arising from student feedback.</p> <p>b. Consult Student Reps for their views on the Student Rep system so they can raise issues and seek appropriate changes and support for the system.</p>

4. Code of Conduct for Student Representatives

Student Representatives recognise the value and impact of their role, and commit to it by undertaking training, participating in representative activities, and attending relevant meetings.

They proactively engage with all students they have committed to represent, to seek their views and represent those views fairly at the appropriate level. Student Representatives feedback on both positive activity and on actions taken in response to issues that have been raised.

- 4.1 Student Reps, when formally expressing an interest in the role, should appreciate the importance and the time needed to undertake the role effectively.
- 4.2 Student Reps should attend all mandatory training to ensure they are prepared for the role to participate in meetings and other related activities.
- 4.3 Student Reps should ensure that they appropriately prepared for meetings and have gathered any relevant student feedback.
- 4.4 Student Reps should attend all meetings expected of their role. Attendance could be in person or remotely facilitated, at the discretion of the Chair(s) to ensure maximum attendance.
- 4.5 If the Student Rep is unable to attend for any reason, it is expected that they would notify key contacts and arrange for another Student Rep to take their place, if appropriate. Student Reps should ensure they are still able to contribute (where distance learning has taken place within that term or to facilitate Student Voice Groups during placements).
- 4.6 Student Reps should feed back to the appropriate students or members of the community that they represent.
- 4.7 If the Student Rep feels they can no longer fulfil the role, they should inform the SU, who should subsequently inform the relevant department(s) and begin the process to recruit.
- 4.8 If a Student Rep fails to meet the requirements of the role, they may be removed and a replacement sought by the relevant department(s) in cooperation with the SU.
- 4.9 The SU and department will develop mechanisms by which Student Reps' performance will be assessed to ensure that every representative is achieving their full potential within the role. This mechanism will be reviewed annually.

5. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by Education Committee on behalf of Senate to ensure it remains fit for purpose and continues to meet the needs of students, the University and the SU effectively.

- 5.1 The SU will actively consult Student Reps for their views on the system so they can raise issues and seek appropriate changes and support for the system.
- 5.2 The relevant University and SU bodies shall ensure that issues are captured effectively to support the regular review of the Student Rep system and related policies. This policy will be monitored the SU and the University to ensure continuous improvement.
- 5.3 The Students Union, Student Services and Quality and Academic Development will monitor and report on the impact of this area of work as part of the University quality cycle.
- 5.4 Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) will receive an update on the annual rollover and review of the policy in advance of making a recommendation to Education Committee.

Appendix 1: Selection of Student Representatives

The process for selecting Student Reps is based on the principles of fairness, openness and transparency.

- A1.1 The opportunity to act as a Student Rep is advertised to all students through the SU and departments from the start of the academic year. Departments will work proactively with the SU to promote the opportunity and responsibility that comes with being a Student Rep.
- A1.2 Should the departments receive any expression of interest the department should forward details on to the SU. The SU should notify departments of the details of course representatives once they have completed training and qualified as a Student Reps.
- A1.3 All Student Reps will attend training for their role. Only once training has been completed shall they be recognised as a Student Rep.
- A1.4 The election of Department Lead Representatives shall be facilitated by the SU and shall be open to those who have attained the position of Student Rep and have participated in an SVG. On occasions when only one rep has nominated themselves for the role of DLR, the SU Education Team reserve the right to appoint themselves without an election process.
- A1.5 Three student representatives from each faculty will be appointed as members of Faculty Education Committee and act as student faculty representatives for a period of 12 months. Where available these students will represent the undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research communities.

Appendix 2: Student Representative roles

Student representative roles ensure students across the University are represented and that there is effective representation at all levels of the University. Students in any student representative role follow the guiding principles, Roles and Responsibilities and Student Code of Conduct as set out in this policy.

Listed Below are seven important student roles within the University of Essex. These roles give students the opportunity to facilitate changes around the University and promote student voice. These roles offer students a chance to build a range of skills such as: minute taking, liaising, advocacy, communication, leadership, and so forth. These roles are vital to the progress of the University, enhancing and tailoring students' experiences.

The Code of Conduct for Student Representatives sets out the commitment to attend meetings wherever possible (including remote attendance) and expectations where it's not possible to attend for good reason.

A2.1 Departmental Lead Representatives (DLRs):

Students who are elected each year to represent students within their department and across the University.

- Voted for and held accountable to Faculty Representatives.
- A point of contact between Student Reps and the department.
- Attend all SVGs.
- Attend departmental business meetings as appropriate.
- Attend all lead reps meetings.
- Eligible to stand for student parliament.
- Allocated to the course review process by the department and the SU.
- Review of the departmental handbook (annually).

A2.2 Faculty representatives:

Faculty Representatives are elected each year by DLRs and the SU Education Team within their faculty to represent the interests of the Student Reps within their faculty.

- Attend selected SVGs as appropriate.
- Attend all lead reps meeting.
- Attend faculty meetings.
- Eligible to stand for student parliament.

A2.3 Faculty Southend and Postgraduate Convenors:

Students who are appointed each year to be the senior Student Rep for the faculty, site or mode of postgraduate study.

- The lead student rep in the faculty.
- Attend relevant SVGs.
- Attend all lead reps meetings.
- Attend faculty meetings and meetings of Education Committee, Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) and Senate.

A2.4 Elected officers:

Sabbatical Officers and part time officers with primary responsibility for all of the SU's work on matters relating to representation.

- Attend all student parliament meetings.
- Attend all relevant University committees, task & finish groups and other group as appropriate.

Appendix 3: Student Voice Groups

A3.0. Student Voice Groups

- A3.1. Student Voice Groups (SVGs), are committees made up of student representatives and members of staff. They provide an accessible arena for students to discuss, with staff, issues connected to teaching, learning and student support. They also provide an opportunity for the academic department to consult with students and receive feedback on new proposals.

A3.2. Key Principles of SVGs:

All SVGs are guided by the following principles, which aim to ensure that SVGs:

- A3.2.1. Provide an accessible forum to enable students to discuss teaching, learning and student support issues and any other issue that may be affecting the students they represent with staff in an open manner, within the framework of the formal structures. The department should consult with SVG on new course proposals, curriculum development and changes to the department's assessment strategy.
- A3.2.2. Encourage the resolution of issues and co-production of solutions and support improvements at a departmental level. Issues raised through the SVG should be discussed in a timely manner and no later than the next SVG, at the relevant department meetings.
- A3.2.3. Ensure that discussions and resulting actions are documented and disseminated to the student body represented through the SVG. This is key to the success of SVGs.
- A3.2.4. Ensure that issues which remain unresolved after attempts to resolve within the department are escalated to the relevant Faculty Dean or Faculty Education Committees. This is to ensure that such issues can be discussed more widely and escalated within the University as necessary.
- A3.2.5. Operate with transparency through the publication of SVG minutes with the Students' Union and the Student Experience Team. Minutes should be uploaded to the relevant SVG Box folder within 10 working days of the SVG taking place.
- A3.2.6. Within 10 working days of SVGs taking place, departments should keep a record of all changes that have been made as a result of student feedback, gathered from all University feedback mechanisms. through action logs and the Department Student Feedback record that are shared with the Student Experience Team and Students' Union

A3.3. Aims & objectives:

- A3.3.1. to facilitate greater communication between students and academic staff

- A3.3.2. to identify areas of concern to students and/or staff
- A3.3.3. to ensure student input at all levels of decision making
- A3.3.4. to disseminate examples of good practice within the department
- A3.3.5. to promote engagement of student participation in quality assurance and enhancement

A3.4. SVG Membership:

- A3.4.1. The Head of Department and Director of Education shall be members of SVG. Relevant Directors and Tutors may be included in the membership. It is recommended that students should be in the majority membership present at all SVG meetings. While a majority presence of students is desirable, this should not prevent the convening of meetings.
- A3.4.2. Where there are a large number of Representatives in a department – to the point that it is no longer practical to accommodate all of them – Student Representatives should, in collaboration with the department, nominate before each SVG appropriate attendees. They should represent undergraduate and postgraduate (taught and research) programmes, each year, and means should be adopted to ensure that representatives can obtain the views of part-time and distance learning students (where appropriate). Departments are also welcome to structure student representatives in alternate ways, should this be appropriate, for example, nominating modular representatives to report on specific modules.
- A3.4.3. SVGs can be chaired or co-chaired by a student. The Students' Union will provide training for any student rep wishing to take on this role. Where a department chairs the SVG, the Directors of Education, or their nominee, will take on this responsibility. The Head of Department is responsible for ensuring that action is taken in response to any decisions reached by the committee. Consideration should be given to the diversity of the membership of the SVG.
- A3.4.4. Where there are no Student Representatives available, the Faculty Convenor or nominated SU Staff will attend the SVG and share any feedback that has been gathered.
- A3.4.5. The Secretary to the SVG shall be nominated by the Chair(s) of the SVG.
- A3.4.6. Co-opting other members onto SVG's:
 - a. any student may be invited as a participant to the SVG at the discretion of the chair
 - b. other members of staff may be invited onto the SVG as an observer

A3.5. SVG Meetings:

- A3.5.1. SVGs should meet a minimum of three times per academic year; with at least one meeting in each of the teaching terms of the department. Flexibility on the timing and frequency of SVGs should be taking into consideration depending on the starting point and structure relevant cohorts.
- A3.5.2. SVGs should be scheduled in such a way that enables student reps to attend regardless of their professional commitments. For example, work hours should be considered when organising SVG meetings for apprenticeship cohorts. An adequate amount of time, which enables each student rep time to relay their feedback, must also be allocated to the meeting. This may result in individual SVGs for apprenticeship cohorts if appropriate.
- A3.5.3. Departments are encouraged to allocate a specific week to each regular meeting of the SVG at the beginning of the academic year to allow students to gather views in a timely manner. Whenever possible, departments should consult the SU while scheduling the SVG meetings to maximise attendance.
- A3.5.4. Chair(s) of the SVG are able to call extraordinary meetings to discuss particular items that may require special attention. It may also be appropriate for focus groups of SVG members to be convened to work together on a particular topic. Virtual meetings of SVGs, or sub-groups of the SVG, may be held in addition to scheduled meetings as necessary.
- A3.5.5. SVGs must be publicised to all students in the department so that they may inform the student representatives of any issues.
- A3.5.6. The agenda for the SVG must include student business as section A and a call for specific agenda items must be made in advance of the meeting to allow students to add items to the agenda. Section A must include a standing item to give students the opportunity to raise any points at the meeting. This should form the majority of the meeting. Formal business (see section A3.5.6.) should be circulated for information and should appear as section B of the agenda; items in section B should not routinely be starred for discussion but members are able to star items for discussion, as appropriate. Postgraduate Research SVGs may have a different format, where appropriate.
- A3.5.7. The agendas for SVGs should include the following as formal business; information related to these should be circulated electronically in advance of the meeting for information, with members able to star items for discussion:
- Chair's report on developments of updates from any action points from the previous meeting; Departments should consult students on Annual Review of Courses reports, External examiner reports, all satisfaction survey outcomes and Student Module Evaluations
 - new and revised programme developments (if any)

- A3.5.8. The unconfirmed minutes of an SVG meeting, as approved by the Chair, should normally be circulated to all of those present, the Faculty Convenor, the Deputy Dean (Education), and the Student Experience Team within 10 working days of the meeting.
- A3.5.9. Minutes and action logs will be reviewed by the Student Experience Team and the SU, and reported to Education Committee (via Student Experience Committee) (see appendix 4).
- A3.5.10. To support departments to effectively prepare for and run SVGs, a SVG Briefing will be provided at the start of the Academic Year, delivered by the Student Experience Team in collaboration with the SU. In addition a toolkit is available from the Student Experience Team that includes templates which should be used for recording minutes and actions. This toolkit is available in the SVG Box folder, which will be shared with departments.

Appendix 4: Student Voice Group Reporting Structure

Phase 1: Departmental Student Voice Groups

Trained Student Reps



Phase 2: Faculty Education Committees

3 Student Reps per Faculty

Faculty Convenors

Postgraduate convenor



Phase 3: Reports go to the following Committees:

1. AQSC (Academic Quality and Standards Committee)

VP Education

Faculty Convenors

Postgraduate Convenor

2. Research Committee

VP Education

3. Ethics Committee

VP Education

4. Student Experience Committee

Four student members as nominated by the SU President



Phase 4: Education Committee

SU President

VP Education

Faculty Convenors

Postgraduate Convenor



Phase 5: Senate

SU President

VP Education

Faculty Convenors

Postgraduate Convenors

Two student members from within Student Leadership team of the Students' Union



Phase 6: University Council

SU President

Document Control Panel

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