

STUDENT VOICE (Student Representation) POLICY



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AIM

This policy enshrines the principle of students being co-owners of their education 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 in 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.

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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 ACTIVITY	TIMESCALE
Students' Union	Student Representatives recruited, trained and allocated to modules (repeated at key points during the year)	October
	Election of 1st year Student Parliament Representatives	October
Student Representatives	Gathering phase of mid-term module feedback	October
Department Lead Representative	First round of SVG Meetings	November
Students' Union	Student Representative allocation to modules. January starter Student Representatives recruited and trained.	January
Student Representatives	Gathering phase of mid-term module feedback	February
Department Lead Representative	Second round of SVG Meetings	February
	Collection of Feedback	March
Department Lead Representative	Election of DLR's and Faculty Representatives	Last week of Term
	Third round of SVG meetings	1st three weeks of Summer Term
Students' Union	Election of Student Parliament Representatives for next academic year (excl. 1st year reps)	May
	Collection of Feedback	
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.

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.

2.3 Communication

As well as communicating student views to the University, Student Reps, in conjunction with departments, must close the feedback loop by communicating information and actions committed in response to feedback through efficient communication channels, 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.

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, at the beginning of 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:

- 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.
- b. Be approachable and receptive to the views of Student Reps and encourage appropriate action in response to student feedback.
- c. Invite the SU to appropriate departmental and course review meetings to ensure participation by the relevant Student Reps.
- 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.

3.2 The SU will:

- a. Provide an induction training session in collaboration with the University and Departments at appropriate points in the year.
- b. Provide additional opportunities for training, including advice on structure, policy and procedures, to enable Student Reps to continually develop and participate effectively.
- c. Provide suitable materials through digital media to assist Student Reps in the execution of their duties.
- d. Provide appropriate financial support to sabbatical officers and Student Reps for costs incurred in participation in the Student Rep system. ⁽¹⁾
- e. Work with the University to ensure students receive recognition for their work as a Student Rep.

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:

- a. Provide the SU with the necessary information to participate in all appropriate decision-making structures, including meeting times, dates and agendas.
- 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.

3.4 The SU will:

- a. Provide Student Reps to attend appropriate meetings, committees and working groups.
- b. Provide support for Student Reps whilst in attendance at meetings.
- 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.

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:

- 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.
- b. Aid Student Reps with publicising any actions and/or decisions to students.

3.6 The SU will:

- a. Support students in communicating outcomes arising from student feedback.
- 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.

(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.

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 facilitated, at the discretion of the Chair(s).
- 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 a report on the annual review of the policy in advance of making a recommendation to Education Committee.

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APPENDIX I: 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 nominated Student Reps will attend training for their role. Only once training has been completed shall they be recognised as a Student Rep.
- A1.4 All Elected Officers shall be elected in line with the constitution of the SU.
- A1.5 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.
- A1.6 The election of Faculty Representatives shall be facilitated by the SU and shall be open to those who have attended the position of Student Rep and have participated in an SVG. The election shall be conducted on the basis that each Department Lead Representative shall have one vote for each position in their faculty.
- A1.7 The election of Student parliament reps shall be facilitated by the SU and shall be open to those who fall within the community that requires representation. The election shall be conducted on the basis that every member of the community whose representative is being elected shall have one vote.

APPENDIX II: 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.

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 Module Representatives (Module Reps):

Students who have qualified to be representatives through participation with the initial training programme as conducted by the SU. There may be variance from one department to another as to the level at which students represent, to reflect course structures and cohort size, and as such, this role may also be referred to as a Course Rep, Module Rep or Year Rep.

- Allocated to modules throughout the academic year.
- Participate in the SVG process.
- Work informally with the module leaders to improve the delivery of modules.
- Eligible to stand for student parliament.

A2.2 Department 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).

A2.3 Faculty Representatives

Faculty Representatives are elected each year by DLRs 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.

A2.4 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 all SVGs.
- Attend all lead reps meetings.

- Eligible to stand for student parliament.
- Attend faculty meetings and meetings of Education Committee, Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) and Senate.

A2.5 Student Parliament Representatives

- Attend all parliament meetings
- Attend all relevant training

A2.6 Student Parliament Faculty Representative

A representative elected by the DLRs within a faculty to be a member of the sovereign body of the SU.

- Attend all lead reps meeting.
- Attend student parliament meetings.

A2.7 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 III:

STUDENT VOICE GROUPS

A3. 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 Deputy Dean (Education) 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 to all current students and the Students' Union. Minutes should be published in a way that ensures that they are accessible to all students and staff in the department.

A3.3. Aims & Objectives of SVGs:

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 must be chaired or co-chaired by a student, or their nominee from staff in the department or Student's Union. Where a department agrees to co-chair, the Director of Education, or their nominee, will co-chair. 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 chair/co-chair the SVG and students can be co-opted to attend.

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:

- i) Any student may be invited as a participant to the SVG at the discretion of the chair.
- ii) 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.

A3.5.2 The scheduling of meetings must take into account student availability and ensure that an adequate amount of time is allocated to the meeting. 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.

A3.5.3. 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.

A3.5.4. SVGs must be publicised to all students in the department so that they may inform the student representatives of any issues.

A3.5.5. 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. 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.

A3.5.6. 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);

A3.5.7. The unconfirmed minutes of an SVG meeting, as approved by the Chair, should normally be circulated to all of those present, the Faculty Convenor, ~~and~~ the Deputy Dean (Education), and the Student Experience Team within 10 working days of the meeting.

A3.5.8 A toolkit is available from the Student Experience Team that includes templates which should be used for recording minutes and actions.