



Academic Representation Toolkit



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The purpose of Academic Representation is to empower students to become full and active partners in their educational experience with a view to improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The official purpose of a Student/Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) or Postgraduate Research Liaison Forum (PGRLF) is to enable students and staff to jointly participate in the quality assurance of degree programmes, and to provide a report to senior faculty committees outlining that participation.

The concept of a specific meeting to carry out the activities of the SSLC or PGRLF has resulted in a single, formal calendar appointment each term which tries to do everything. This toolkit provides some examples of additional/alternative ways to engage students in the management and review of education provision beyond the traditional SSLC and PGRLF meetings, as those meetings are seen as not fully effective when taken by themselves as the only component of student co-creation.

Student/Staff Liaison Committee & PGR Liaison Forum

A formal meeting between designated student reps, and senior academic and administrative staff. The main purpose of this meeting is to provide a report for a senior Faculty committee on the actions taken in response to student feedback. Good for discussion of issues that have already been raised with the aim of reaching a solution, and for formal reporting of those issues. Ineffective if reps do not attend or if there is no feedback to discuss. Best practice to avoid raising *new* issues for discussion, unless no opportunity to raise prior to the meeting, but can be used for discussion of issues that have already been raised, if a solution was unable to be reached elsewhere. Having a student chair for the meeting is recommended but not required (a meeting can be student-led without being student-chaired).

Rep Drop-ins

A stall or “office hour” in a common area, such as the foyer of an academic building, where reps are available for students to come to them directly with their feedback. Targets the “captive audience” of students waiting for lectures and the “passing trade” of students going about their academic work. Note this would be less effective in a social building, where students are generally “going somewhere” and not thinking about academic work.

Lecture Shout-outs

Reps taking five minutes at the beginning of a lecture or seminar to update students on their work as reps. While not particularly effective for collecting feedback, the main purpose of this activity is reps promoting themselves and their work by closing the feedback loop – telling students about the work that they have done makes them known to students and should encourage students to bring more feedback to them in the future. Note that this works best at the beginning of a lecture or seminar and would be less effective at the end, when students are getting ready to leave.

Town Hall Forums / Student Experience Meetings / Cohort Assemblies

A meeting specifically set up for the purpose of collecting feedback from a large group of students, such as a whole cohort. Could be open floor or thematic. Ideally scheduled into student timetables, if possible, which we believe was the standard approach to these meetings a few years ago, before they were discontinued. Since it is often the case that students are less comfortable talking to staff directly, the most effective Town Hall meetings are organised by admin staff, but facilitated by student reps, with academic staff in attendance for only part of the session. With admin support, these meetings can also form a part of formal reporting. Due to the number of students in attendance, detailed discussion of specific issues is harder, but not impossible; discussion of specific topics may be easier if the session is themed, like a Focus Group or Big Rep Meeting, while an open floor format is better for collecting new feedback. These sessions can also be used for staff and reps to provide feedback on activity that is ongoing.

Digital Feedback Platforms (e.g. Unitu)

The primary purpose of Unitu-like platforms is the efficient collection of student feedback, and the escalation of that feedback directly to the administrative or academic staff who are able to resolve it. These systems also provide a platform for closing the feedback loop, thereby positively reinforcing their effectiveness as a feedback tool. With admin support, digital platforms also provide a ready-made source of feedback and solutions for formal reporting.

Coffee Mornings, Pizza Evenings and/or Feedback Socials

An informal meeting for students to raise issues with reps with the added incentive of refreshments. Like rep drop-ins, provides excellent opportunities for detailed collection of feedback, but less so for discussion of solutions. Depending on the nature of the academic community, may be more or less effective if staff are also in attendance.

Focus Groups (Small Thematic)

One-off meetings set up to discuss a certain topic. These are ideal for getting opinions on something that staff want to find out about, but not as useful for collecting feedback on the day-to-day student experience. This is recommended over an SSLC meeting for discussion of regulatory requirements, such as TEAPs, external accountability reports, and new programme developments, as Focus Groups may draw an audience of interested students which is different from the team of student reps.

Surveys

It is wise to keep survey usage to a minimum, as most other activities are generally more useful. Survey data can be used relatively easily for formal reporting but would be inadequate as the only method of collecting feedback, as engagement with surveys is always very low. Also consider the method by which the survey is promoted to students, taking into account some of the different methods already considered.

Rep and Staff Ad Hoc Meeting (e.g. 1-to-1)

A more informal meeting that is a simplified version of the SSLC concept, with only one member of staff and one student rep. This could be scaled as necessary depending on need – the main point is that this is informal, arranged when needed, and does not have a fixed membership based on roles. This is recommended between SSLC meetings for the discussion of specific student feedback between reps and staff, as the rep who has received the feedback can go straight to the member of staff who can reach a solution without needing to wait for the next SSLC meeting. With admin support, any such meeting can also contribute to formal reporting.

Big Rep Meeting (Large Thematic)

A meeting of all reps in a department with academic staff, which can also contribute to formal reporting if admin staff are available. Useful for discussing specific themes with reps if they already have feedback on the respective topics. However, we would usually recommend Focus Groups or Town Hall meetings for thematic discussions, as they are likely to engage more students who have specific interest in the topics for discussion (i.e., not just reps, who would be invited because of their role rather than because of their interests). The concept of a Big Rep Meeting may be better used as an event and showcase of rep activities.

Potentially combinable into a single concept (since the purpose, scope and admin will be similar):

- Rep Drop-ins, Coffee Mornings and Feedback Socials – Socials and Drop-ins
- Town Halls, Focus Groups and Big Rep Meetings – Thematic Workshops

Further information and guidance on different sessions

Socials and Drop-ins

Introduction

Informal activities designed to enable students to meet with their reps and to enable reps to collect feedback from students. Whether a scheduled event in a seminar room or a pop-up stall in an academic building foyer, including refreshments provides an incentive for students to stop by.

Remit

- Enable students to meet with reps informally to discuss any issues, ideas and praises they have about their academic experience.
- Directly collect feedback from students and promote digital feedback platforms (e.g. Unitu) by entering new feedback into the system as it is received.
- Provide updates on recent rep activity to promote the ongoing work of student representation.

Student Experience Meetings

Introduction

Timetabled sessions for whole cohorts designed for students to provide feedback in an open-floor environment. Facilitated by student reps with academic staff in attendance for the first half of the session. Must be integrated with other systems to avoid functioning in isolation.

Remit

- Enable students to raise any issues, ideas and praises they have about their academic experience directly with staff who can take that feedback away to be addressed.
- Enable students to raise any issues, ideas and praises they have about their academic experience with reps who can anonymise their feedback efficiently.
- Provide updates on recent rep activity to promote the ongoing work of student representation.

Administration

- Ideally scheduled into student timetables/calendars where possible, usually by a DESE/DPGR or tutor. Recommended frequency two or three times per term per cohort group, based on best practice by Departments which already do this. They can be held in person or online.
- Facilitated by staff and reps, who should take notes that can be brought to other meetings, with support from the Academic Communities and Representation team (Guild).

Thematic Workshops

Introduction

Focus groups open to all students which are designed to collect feedback about a specific topic of discussion. By being open to anyone, these sessions may draw an audience of students interested in the specific topic for discussion, thereby being more productive than only inviting student reps.

Remit

- Enable staff to collect feedback from students about specific topics.

Administration

- Scheduled directly by staff when there are topics to discuss. Frequency will depend on when items for discussion arise throughout the year, likely averaging at once or twice per term.
- Administrative support required so minutes of the meeting can be taken and fed into the Student Voice Action Plan, supported by the Student Communities and Partnerships Team.

Ad-Hoc Meetings

Introduction

Informal and arranged when needed, for the discussion of specific student feedback between reps and staff. Does not have a fixed membership based on roles, as the rep who has received the feedback can go straight to the member of staff who can reach a solution.

Remit

- For the discussion of specific solutions to specific student feedback.

Administration

- Scheduled directly between relevant reps and staff when there are issues to discuss. Discussions should be taking place frequently, but at least once a month.
- Administrative support required so minutes of the meeting can be taken and fed into the Student Voice Action Plan. For most small meetings, staff and reps can do this themselves.
- For group discussion meetings, having a student chair is recommended, but not required; a meeting can still be student-led without being student-chaired.

Lecture Shout-Outs

Introduction

A short timeslot at the beginning of an existing timetabled session (lecture, seminar, workshop, tutorial, etc) for reps to address students for the purposes of providing introductions or updates about academic representation.

Remit

- Promote the existence of Academic Reps and the methods by which students can raise any issues, ideas and praises they have about their academic experience.

- Provide updates on the work done by reps and staff in response to student feedback.

Digital Feedback Platforms

Introduction

Digital feedback platforms (such as Unitu) exist to provide a single location for students to submit feedback and see updates on how staff are dealing with it. These platforms can enable student feedback to be categorised into NSS topics and reported on by department, and should have the facility to assign specific members of staff to action different items.

Remit

- Provide an accessible digital platform for students to be able to submit any issues, ideas and praises to reps and staff for action.
- Enable students to track the progress of their feedback from submission to resolution.
- Enable administrators to assign actions to academic and support staff from within the system.
- Allow staff to provide regular updates on their progress while addressing student feedback.