STUDENTS' UNION UCL

Academic Representatives

Annual Report
2021-22

Introduction

Academic representation at UCL is both crucial and important for the improvement and cohesion of the student experience across all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Here at Students' Union UCL, we work in partnership with UCL, Course Reps, Lead Department Reps and Faculty Reps to continuously advocate for changes and initiatives that benefit the student body. The role of Academic Reps is key for bridging the gap between academic staff and the student cohort, and essential in representing students at every level across UCL. Academic Reps are the voice of students; they interact with staff and are involved in local decision-making, policy creation, and more. Although this past year saw a positive move back to in-person teaching and education, the student body has still been dealing with the effects of the pandemic. Despite this, our 1,898 Reps have continued to work tirelessly, providing the Union with valuable insight and feedback. Helping us to further improve the support we offer students and ensures that education at our institution remains a transformative opportunity for all, no matter the circumstances.

Throughout the academic year, Students' Union UCL supports and monitors the work of our Academic Reps. As we approach the end of each academic year, we ask our Reps to complete a handover and reflection form that we use for summarising the feedback and recommendations of Reps for future development; the results of which are presented in this report. The return to in-person teaching with the continuation of hybrid learning has provided various challenges, but our Academic Reps have successfully adapted and carefully created solutions to issues faced across their departments and faculties.

Some of the successes achieved by our Academic Reps include extending assessment deadlines, establishing support networks both online and offline, organising social events to help to create vibrant and inclusive communities as well as improving mental health support services, to name a few. These examples show the level of dedication, time and effort our Academic Reps put into their roles, which in turn, has created a better learning environment for students during what remained a disruptive year. Despite readjusting to in-person and hybrid working environments, along with facing industrial staff action throughout the course of the year, our Academic Reps have continued forging positive relationships with their peers, other Reps and academic staff. This has ensured that teaching, in its various forms, was delivered smoothly and tailored to benefit students' wants and needs.

While the positive impact Academic Reps have on the student body is clear to see, taking on this role is also an opportunity for development for the Reps themselves. Most of our Academic Reps have reported that taking on this role has helped them improve their communication, teamwork, leadership and time management skills, while also boosting their confidence. The reflection and feedback we gather from Reps show that they are truly proud of the work they have done this year, and their subsequent achievements. Throughout this document you can see reflective statements from our Academic Reps highlighting the work they have completed in the 2021-22 academic year. Our Academic Rep of the Month and Academic Rep of the Year awards serve as a reminder of their efforts and recognition for their hard work. All engaged Academic Reps receive a certificate that is awarded to them at the end of the academic year to mark their achievements.

Although this year was still met with challenges, Academic Reps have managed to make sure that students' needs were the main priority and ensured that the return to in-person and hybrid learning did not take away from the unique UCL experience. Their adaptability and reliability made working during this transitional year far smoother. This report is a showcase of our Academic Rep community and the tremendous contributions they have made to the re-shaping of education at UCL. They are all a testament to the resiliency of our student body and show that the Academic Rep network is just as valuable and just as strong as ever before.

Hamza Ahmed

Education Officer 2022/23

"Relaying student concerns with specific examinations, making available mock mcq exams that weren't previously, and coordinating finals deadlines to better suit everyone on the programme."

"With my team of reps, we came up with issues that led to the development of a ChangeMakers project on mental health support in the Division."

Key Figures

This year we had **1898** Academic Representatives

We worked with Academic Reps for **152** of **173** SSCCs (**88%**)

65% of SSCCs appointed a Lead Department Rep.

98% of Faculty Reps were filled

747 Academic Reps completed a handover document for their successor.

687 Academic Reps received recognition certificates.

1213 Academic Reps were trained this year (**64%**)

Key Figures by Faculty

Rep training completion

Faculty	Trained per Faculty	Number of Reps	Percentage trained
Arts & Humanities	138	255	54%
Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment	82	133	62%
Brain Sciences	108	155	70%
Engineering	116	178	62%
Institute of Education	155	278	56%
Laws	5	7	71%
Life Sciences	140	183	77%
Mathematical & Physical Sciences	108	138	78%
Medical Sciences	152	222	68%
Population Health Sciences	67	95	71%
Social & Historical Sciences	142	254	56%
Total	1,213	1,898	64%

Rep Reflection and Handover completion

Faculty	Responses per Faculty	Number of Reps	Responses as a percentage
Arts & Humanities	81	255	32%
Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment	56	133	42%
Brain Sciences	59	155	27%
Engineering	74	178	71%
Institute of Education	75	278	27%
Laws	5	7	71%
Life Sciences	79	183	43%
Mathematical & Physical Sciences	65	138	47%
Medical Sciences	124	222	56%
Population Health Sciences	43	95	45%
Social & Historical Sciences	86	254	34%
Total	747	1,898	39%

"Complete the training course on Moodle as early as possible it will provide you with a good framework of how to present a case for making changes in the department."

The Academic Rep Experience

In 2021-22 there were 1,898 Academic Representatives on record, compared to 1,896 for 2020-21. Each year through an Annual Survey of Academic Reps we examine the experience of our Academic Reps and how we can improve their experience.

Recruitment

Academic Representative roles are advertised to students both by departments and the Union but ultimately students put themselves forward for the role. Therefore, we asked Academic Reps what was their motivation for becoming an Academic rep? Our survey results show that a vast majority (89.8%) of Academic reps were motivated to take on the role because they 'wanted to make positive changes for students'. This result highlights to the Union the importance in assisting and showing reps how to make positive changes for students to maintain Academic rep motivation and satisfaction. This also shows the importance of celebrating these successes and recognising reps for the positive changes they are making. The percentages of total reps selecting the motivations 'to feel part of a community' (68.3%) and '[to] develop and enhance my skills' (70.5%) highlight that they were roughly equally valued. Therefore, it is important that we continue to provide spaces where reps can come together to network and socialise. The programme of skill enhancing workshops provided by the Union also remains valuable, and will continue in the 2022-23 academic year. Academic Reps who have selected the option 'Other' have commonly stated that they wanted to 'challenge themselves' and 'handle more responsibility'. This survey highlights aspects of the role which can be of interest for prospective Academic reps and what aspects the Union need to focus on to maintain Academic rep motivation and satisfaction.

> *"Applying an `organic model` to create and develop a community, my fellow MSc students and I formed weekly gatherings. It has been a place to meet, chat, discuss our plans and ideas, help and support each other in our studies, and.. have fun! It genuinely helped us have a richer experience and make pleasant memories."*

> *"We had few equipment that were old and not being used in labs, so we managed to get most of this equipment serviced and put back into useful practice. This really helped research students to carry on their own work much faster."*
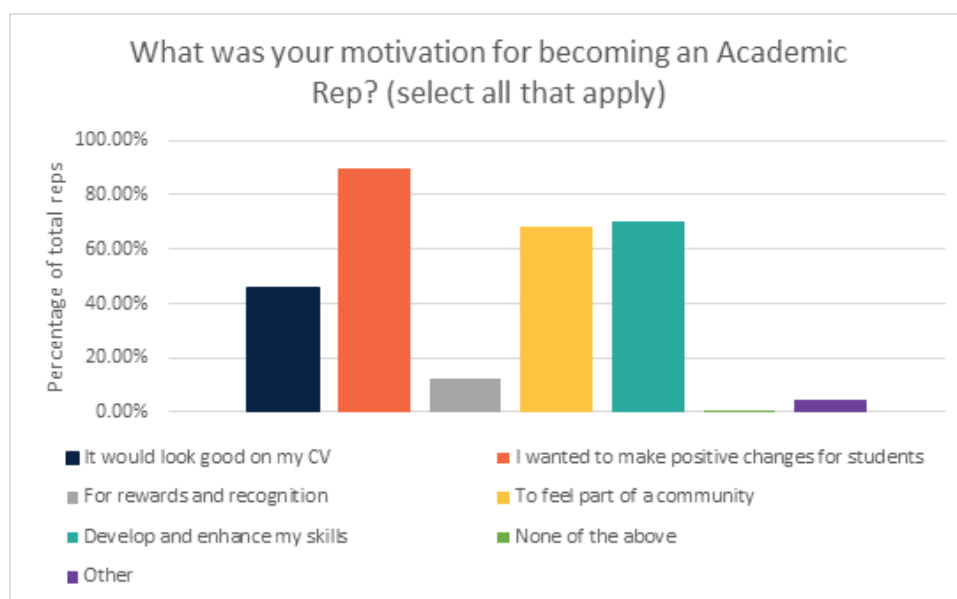
Training and Support

Training for new Course and Research Student Representatives provides students with an introduction to the important elements of their role and asks them to consider the strategies they will utilise to fulfil their necessary responsibilities. This role-based training encourages Academic Reps to understand students' priorities, and to think about how they can work with staff to take action that will improve students' education, whilst also introducing how the Union works and interacts with UCL. Due to Covid-19, all training remained entirely online; it consisted of an interactive training programme culminating in a quiz to test the Reps' knowledge.

The graph below outlines the number of Academic Reps who completed the 20 minute asynchronous training via Moodle. As you can see below, there was a significant decrease in the number and proportion of our Academic Reps who completed the training. This is a concern that we are looking to address in the 2022-23 with reminders to Reps to complete the online training in our weekly newsletter and over the course of the Academic Year. We have also highlighted the importance of the training and what is covered at Faculty Welcome Events and other in-person training events with Academic Reps.

The most likely explanation for a decrease in the number and proportion of Academic Reps completing the training is a post-Covid reduction in engagement as well as reduced staff capacity at the start of the 2021-22 academic year where Academic Reps were most likely to complete the online training.

"Don't put off doing the Rep training - it doesn't take long and there are some useful tips. Also you will only be busier as term progresses so good to get to grips with your role sooner than later."

Reps Trained (Number and Proportion)
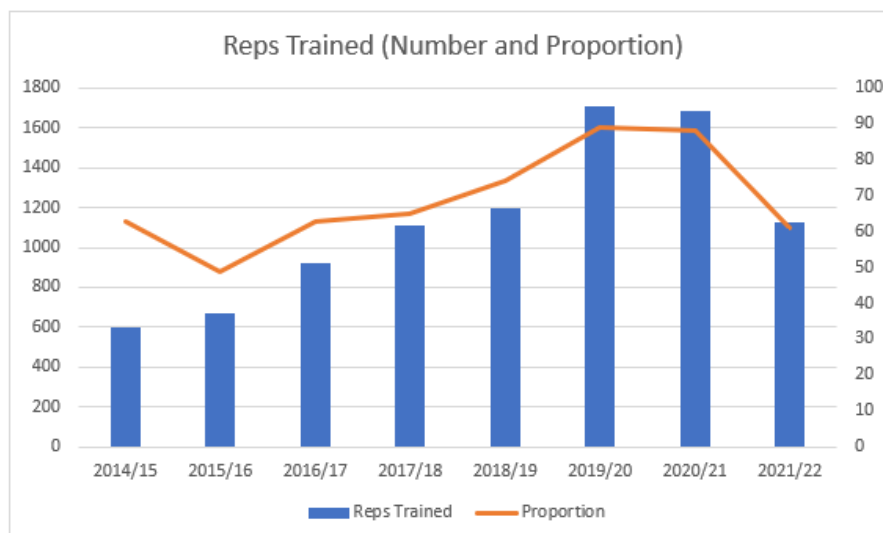
In addition to the core training, additional online training sessions were held virtually, on the following topics: Making the Most of your Virtual Common Rooms, Improving Access and Participation of BAME Students in Postgraduate Research, Making the Curriculum More Inclusive and Taking Forward Race Equality, Improving Support for Students with Disabilities, Improving Sustainability at UCL and Using Data and Evidence to Make Change.

In November 2022, we embarked on our initial stage of masterclasses and workshops regarding Departmental Societies and Public Speaking, with more sessions to follow in the first and second term. For the 2022-23 academic year, we will undertake a training needs assessment to ascertain what masterclasses and workshops would be of benefit to our Academic Reps. In response to their feedback, we will craft sessions using our internal expertise, student societies and charitable organisations which are supportive of our aims as a Union.

Support

Academic Reps were asked as part of the end of year survey to rate the support which they have received from the Union in 4 key areas: online resources, individual support, training, and email updates. Overall, all 4 areas were well rated, with 'email updates' receiving the highest proportion of 'Very Good' responses (51.5%). Individual support was the lowest rated of these categories, a similar response to last year's report. Because both years took place during Covid-19, this result can likely be attributed to the difficulties in providing an individual support programme virtually. With increased staff resources and the return of in-person teaching and increased presence on campus, we hope to see an improvement in individual support offered to our Academic Reps. Rep training took place on Moodle in an asynchronous format and majority of responses regarding training fell in the 'Good' category (44.4%).
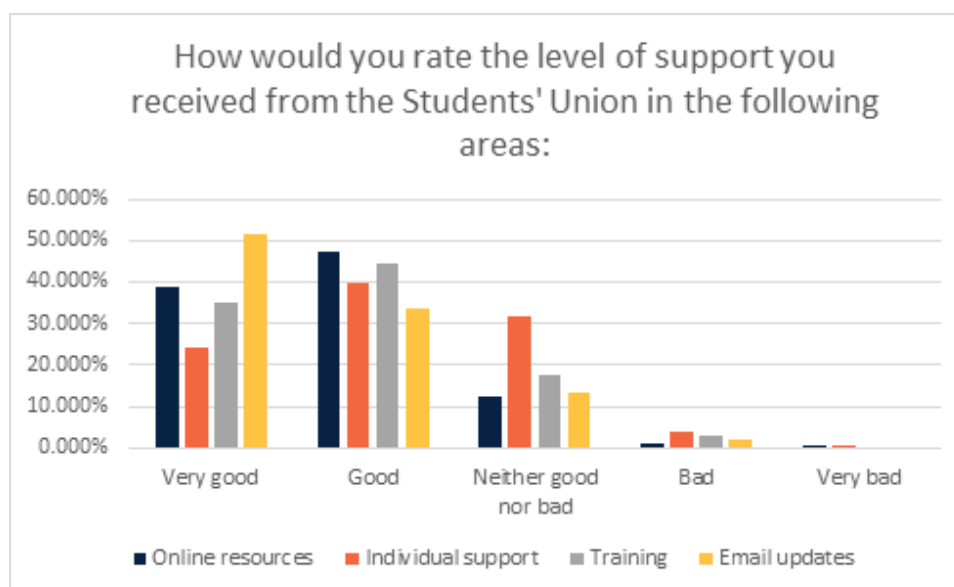
Communication, Thoughts & Feelings

The Union uses a variety of methods to keep Academic reps up to date with key information. Reps were asked about their preferred ways of receiving communication from the Union. The vast majority (69.9%) of reps favoured email communication. This may be because students at UCL are encouraged check their emails frequently and the majority of them do so during term time. The Rep mailbox is always monitored by a staff member, so response time to queries generally sits at less than 72 hours. This quick response time could be another reason why reps prefer email communication. The second preferred form of communication is the Rep Newsletter at 55.7%. It should be noted that the Rep Newsletter is also delivered via email and further highlights the convenience of the platform for Academic Reps. For the 2022-23 academic year, the Rep newsletter has been disseminated via MailChimp to better analyse the engagement in the newsletter from Academic Reps. The other forms of communication are ranked comparatively low, the lowest being 'podcast' at 6.6%. This survey highlights that email communication is the preferred way Academic Reps like to be kept up-to-date with news from the Union and should be the communication method prioritised next year.

> *"Check Academic Reps week's newsletter each week and you will find many useful information either for your study or for your social engagement."*

> *"Between us as academic reps, we personally used a mix of WhatsApp group messages, email and Moodle as communication methods. This would also give a chance for them to respond. In-person communication was also used, but this has a more limited reach compared to the above methods."*
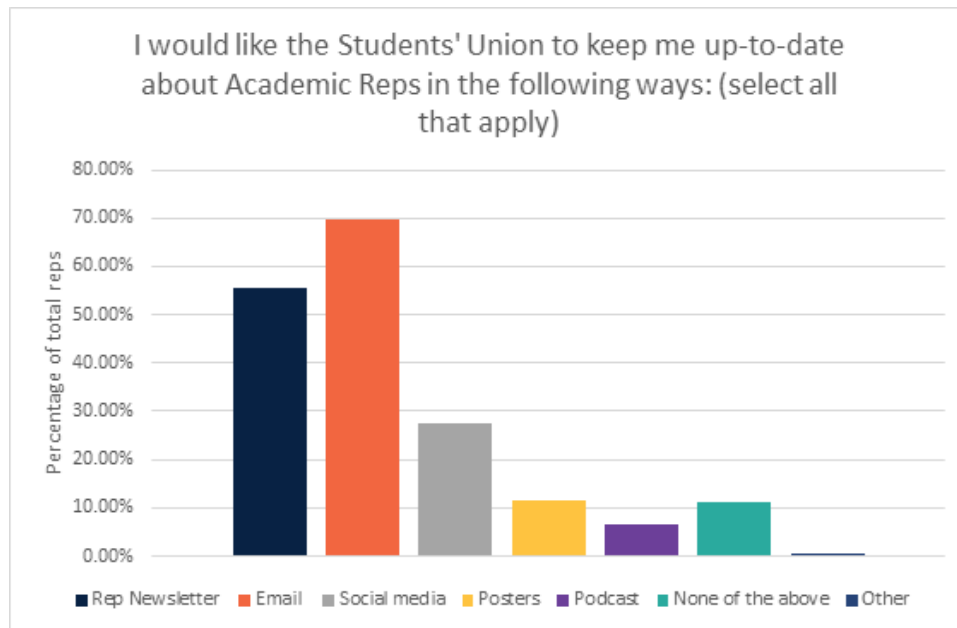
Understanding of their role

Academic Reps were asked as part of the survey to indicated whether they have a good understanding of the following statements: who to contact when different issues arise in my Department/Faculty; structures and processes within my Department/Faculty for providing feedback; what my role is and what my responsibilities are. We are pleased to see that the overall results skew towards 'Very Good' and 'Good'. The statement 'I have a good understanding what my role is and what my responsibilities are' received the highest proportion of 'Very Agree' responses (56.6%). This may be a reflection on the quality of training offered and information found on our Moodle course. The other two statements received the highest proportion of 'Agree' responses, with the statement coded in navy at 48.5% and the statement coded in orange at 48.2%. This survey highlights that the Union is utilising the right strategies in keeping Academic reps informed about key information.
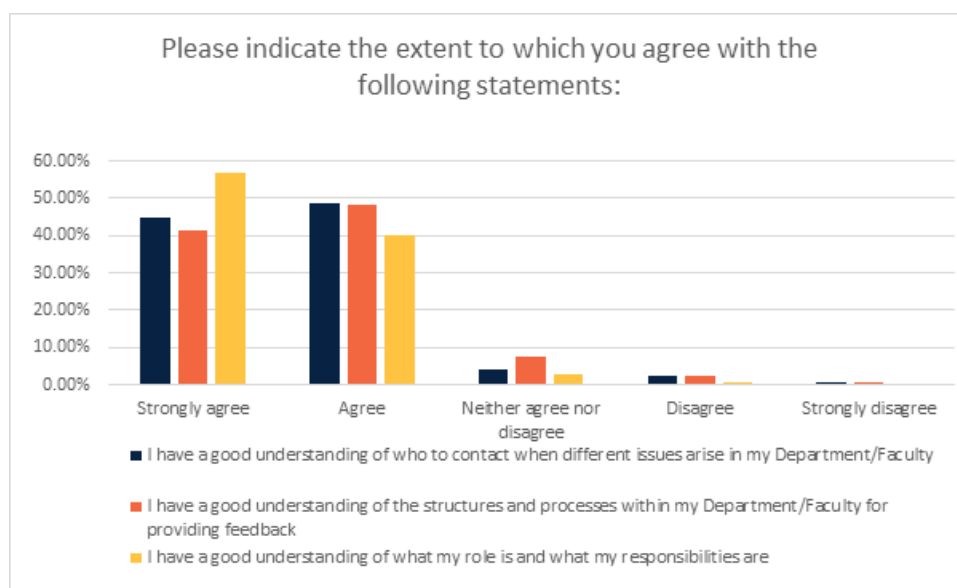
Reflection

Overall, the feedback highlights that the best way to support Academic Reps is to make them feel part of a community. Academic Reps appreciated the regular communication they received via weekly newsletter emails from the Union's Rep Assistant. This is an indicator to continue sending weekly newsletter emails in the following academic years. To further improve support for Academic Reps and make them feel part of a community, it is suggested that Academic Representative staff make their presence more well known. This could be via sending a 'Meet the Team' email, having faces and contact information available on the Moodle Page. Support via training seems to provide reps tools and information they need for their role. However, training can be improved to support reps with role specific challenges/opportunities for example co-chairing an SSCC meeting. A clearer idea about what the Union's role is and their duties to reps should be made clearer via Moodle or other forms of communication.

Action: We will encourage our Academic Reps to take the next step on their leadership journey by standing to be a Lead Department Rep, Faculty Rep or Sabbatical Officer so that they can continue to make positive changes for students.

Action: We will have an enhanced focused on Departmental Societies to help our Academic Reps form vibrant and inclusive communities.

Action: We will continue to expand our Masterclasses and Workshop sessions to encourage our Academic Reps to develop and enhance their skills.

Action: We will communicate clearly with Academic Reps to reinforce that they are part of the Students' Union and keep them up to date with key Union activities such as our Education Zone, elections and what the Union believes in. We will also work to make the Education Officer more visible, so reps understand the wider representative structures they sit in.

Action: We will work to inform reps about the training and emphasise why it is important and how it will benefit their role. Reminders will go out in the weekly newsletter and stated at any in-person events with reps.

Academic Rep of the Year Awards

Established in 2017-2018, the Academic Rep of the Year Awards celebrates reps who went the extra mile to represent students and worked with staff to improve student's academic experiences. All rep nominations are made by both staff and students following the mentioned criteria. This year, we continued with the same process of recognising one winner for each faculty, and one overall UCL Academic Rep of the Year.

Overall Winner

Martin Lopez Howe represents students within the Faculty of Social & Historical Sciences and has a three-year track record of improving student experiences in this faculty with high impact initiatives. Some of his successes include influencing the alteration of his degree's module requirements and setting up an undergraduate journal.

Martin has been described to have "been an immensely successful point of contact between staff and students, making their academic lives livelier." He has done this by improving the availability of resources for students and organised and facilitated additional academic lectures by external speakers for interested individuals, within and outside the department. Martin found working with staff in his faculty to be "quite interesting, since there is a lot of information about policies, courses, projects and surveys that is easy to miss for the student not paying attention."

His advice to someone thinking about being a rep is to remember that "in essence, what can be achieved as rep depends very much on personal and collective motivation. As a result, if there is an issue to address, a staff member to contact, or your opinion is asked on a project or group, participate! Departments can't know what students feel or want, so it's your opportunity to change that."

Overall, through his time and energy, Martin has "fundamentally changed the relationship between the students and the Department of History".

Martin Lopez Howe
Course Rep, History
Overall Winner Academic Rep of the Year 2022

The Academic Rep of the Year Faculty winners 2022 were:

Faculty of Arts and Humanities: Freya Proudman, Lead Department Rep, School of Slavonic and East European Studies

Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment: Malgorzata Rutkowska, Lead Department Rep, Bartlett School of Architecture

Faculty of Brain Sciences: Heather Sampson, Faculty Rep, UCL Queen Square Institute of Neurology

Faculty of Engineering Sciences: Andrea Franchini, Faculty Rep, Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering

Institute of Education: Molly Edwards and Harriet Israel [co-winners], Lead Department Reps, Education, Practice and Society and Psychology and Human Development

Faculty of Laws: Laura Beaumont (Course Rep), Angel Foster (Course Rep), Angela Brown (Course Rep), Charlotte Choy (Faculty Rep), Laws

Faculty of Life Sciences: Azure H Lo, Course Rep, Division of Biosciences

Faculty of Mathematical & Physical Sciences: Qasim Afghan, Lead Department Rep, Space and Climate Physics

Faculty of Medical Sciences: Anna-Dimitra Kataki, Research Student Rep, Division of Surgery and Interventional Science

Faculty of Population Health Sciences: Whitney Wells, Lead Department Rep, Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care

Faculty of Social & Historical Sciences: Martin Lopez Howe, Course Rep, History

Tell Us About Your Work

All Academic Reps are enrolled on a "Academic Representatives" Moodle course where they receive announcements, resources, and training opportunities. Academic Reps can also share with the Students' Union the work they are doing in their roles in the "Tell Us About Your Work" section. This section has highlighted areas some of the "small" or quick wins that our Academic Reps achieve in their roles.

We look forward to continuing to use the "Tell Us About Your Work" submissions in 2022-23 and hope to share examples of good practice and trends with the wider student body. These submissions also feed into our online database of wins that our Academic Reps have recently achieved.

Find out more at https://studentsunionucl.org/education-awards-2022-winners

Academic Rep of the Month

Based on the submissions to the "Tell Us About Your Work" section on Moodle, an Academic Rep of the Month is selected and showcased on our website and in our all-student newsletter every month. This is a great way for Academic Reps to be recognised for their contribution to improving the student experience within their course, department, or faculty. Below is an example from our Academic Reps of the Month from May 2022.

 "I am a postgrad student in Social Policy and Social Research and proudly represent its brilliant students for the academic year 2021-22. UCL gives us a remarkable opportunity to meet amazing and intelligent people from diverse backgrounds. The higher education experience gets richer when students form deep and strong connections. Over the past weeks, we created fabulous, friendly, and dynamic weekly gatherings. We called it the "Tuesday Club". Despite the challenges of studying an intensive PG course, we gathered, chatted, laughed, and helped each other in our studies. I am proud of my fellow students. The Tuesday Club could not be born without their contributions and warm, cooperative spirits!"

Sami Nabili
Social Policy and Social Research
Academic Rep of the Month (May 2022)

Find out more at https://studentsunionucl.org/academic-reps

> *"The most rewarding part of this role was being able to communicate students' concerns or queries to the staff and then find that these queries were followed up on, either through specific helpful action or useful information being provided by the graduate tutor or the deputy graduate tutor. I feel another success on my end was conducting a survey of the PhD students' supervision experience and then collating and communicating this information it to the graduate tutor and their deputy."*

> *"I succeeded this Year in gathering and voicing student feedback, praise and concerns for the modules taught to my cohort. Furthermore, I organised a department-wide networking social event for my coursemates (second-year cohort) to meet other cohorts of the same course (first years, third years, fourth years and some PhD students) in person and have fun while talking about jobs, internships and university topics. We advertised the social event effectively through Departmental emails, WhatsApp and WeChat posts and word of mouth. Fortunately, the event was highly successful and met our expectations for student turnout!"*

Looking ahead

Our Academic Rep Network has a strong foundation which can greatly be enhanced with additional investment and forming closer connections with colleagues across UCL. Another Representation and Democracy Coordinator has been recruited to the Representation and Democracy Team, which will allow us to undertake additional projects as outlined below:

Rewards and Recognition

For the 2022-23 academic year, we have invested in water bottles, notepads and pens as small incentives for our Lead Department and Faculty Reps. Academic Reps who successfully complete the training, attend at least two SSCCs and produce a Rep Handover will receive a LinkedIn recommendation from the Representation and Democracy Team.

Once our new member of staff has been onboarded, we will begin a project to introduce an accreditation scheme for our Academic Rep Network. We will also explore sponsorship opportunities with ethical external companies so that we can offer discounted Academic Rep Hoodies which will greatly increase the visibility of the Network.

Build Vibrant and Inclusive Communities

We are committed to the Union's strategic aim of building vibrant and inclusive communities. We will help Academic Reps to do this by working closely with the Departmental Societies Coordinator to empower Academic Reps to create, join and/or spread the word about the fantastic work that they do. We will also look to formalise the support we offer for our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Reps.

Electing returning Academic Reps in Term 3

Feedback from our Faculty Contacts has indicated that they would benefit from electing returning Academic Reps in Term 3. This is a project we will explore over the course of the 2022-23 academic year and we will present options and proposals to all Faculties about whether this is something feasible which could work for them.

Shape UCL Sessions

We see Shape UCL as a key platform for a significant proportion of our Academic Reps. We have been working with UCL's Student Engagement and Experience Unit to enhance Rep Guidance and have committed to a series of drop-in sessions in Term 1 to increase engagement with the platform.

Cycles of feedback

We feel as though we are quite reactive when it comes to receiving feedback from our Academic Reps. For the 2022-23 academic year, we will produce termly reports regarding Rep successes, feedback from Lead Department and Faculty Reps as well as highlight future issues which are likely to arise in the forthcoming term. In response to the feedback we have received, we will also include recommendations about how Academic Reps can make positive changes on their course and beyond.

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