

 **Academic**
Representatives

Staff Guide to Student Academic Representation

2020-21

 **STUDENTS'**
UNION UCL

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Key prompts and things to consider chronologically, to assist with planning the appointment of Academic Reps locally.

1. Key roles & terms

Academic Representation

Academic representation is a process through which we ensure students' voices are heard. Though their representatives' work with staff, all students should have the opportunity to shape their academic experience. We collectively refer to all students in the roles outlined below as Academic Representatives (or Academic Reps).

Course Representatives

Course Representatives are students who are members of Staff-Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs) and represent the students on a given programme of study. The role of Course Reps is to work with staff to ensure students' feedback is acted on, and that student's voices are represented in departmental decision-making. The role of Course Reps should not be limited to SSCCs; representatives are encouraged to work with their peers and staff both inside and outside of meetings throughout the year.

Research Student Representatives

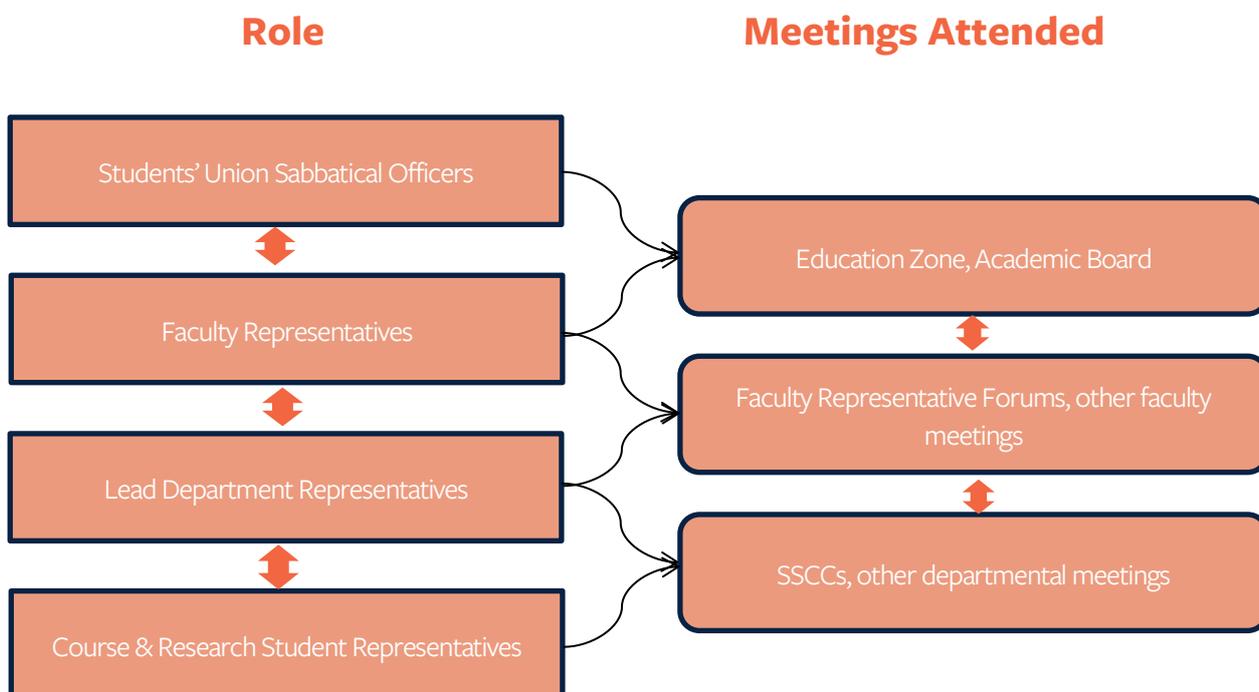
Research Student Representatives play a similar role to Course Representatives, but represent research students rather than taught students on a programme of study. Defining where to place Research Student Reps can be slightly trickier, given they are not assigned to a given programme of study. Any distinct community of postgraduate research students should have representatives, which might be based on department, specialism, physical location, or other attributes.

Lead Department Representatives

Lead Department Representatives are appointed from each SSCC, and take on a leadership role for student representation within their UCL department. They will work closely with staff in the department, jointly chairing the SSCC and agreeing a specific agenda for discussion with a staff Co-Chair in advance of each meeting, according to student priorities. Lead Department Representatives also play a pivotal role in providing a commentary and input into the Annual Student Experience Review (ASER). They will also attend the Department's Teaching Committee (or doctoral education equivalent) as a representative, and communicate relevant items between the two committees. If there are multiple SSCCs in a Department, there will be multiple Lead Department Reps.

Faculty Representatives

Faculty Representatives play a similar role to other student representatives, but engage with Faculty-level staff and committee meetings. Faculty Representatives liaise with other representatives across their Faculty's constituent departments, particularly Lead Department Reps, in order to represent students effectively. Faculty Reps are elected in elections hosted on the Students' Union's website, in close consultation with Faculty staff.



Find More Online:

Detailed role descriptors can be found on our [staff resources webpage](http://studentsunionucl.org/rep/staff).¹

¹ <http://studentsunionucl.org/rep/staff>

Staff-Student Consultative Committees

Staff-Student Consultative Committees are formal meetings for Academic Reps and staff to work together to develop solutions to students' concerns, and prioritise areas for improvement. Some departments have a single SSCC, while others split this into different levels of study. Most commonly, departments operate both an undergraduate and postgraduate SSCC.

Student Engagement

Academic representation is a key mechanism through which UCL and the Students' Union aim to facilitate students' engagement with their educational experience. The UCL Education Strategy 2016-21² commits us to '*expand the opportunities available to our students to participate in creating and shaping policy and practice at local and institutional levels*'. Through the work of Academic Reps who communicate on an ongoing basis with their peers and the staff in their department, all students can be engaged with their teaching, learning, and wider university experience.

Partnership

The Students' Union believe that partnership between staff and students is the purpose of student engagement. Partnership working breaks down divides between staff and students, and enables a joint-approach to problem solving. This approach recognises the different but equal value which staff and students can bring, and through dialogue, helps promote an academic community of staff and students who are engaged with one another's aspirations.

Academic Manual

UCL's Academic Manual is the repository of UCL's policies and regulations. Regulations on Student Academic Representation are contained in Chapter 9, Section 6. There are also requirements for student representation on committees contained in Chapter 9, Section 7. This guide is intended to be read alongside those regulations.

Find More Online:

Full policy on Student Academic Representation sits in Chapter 9, Section 6 of the [UCL Academic Manual](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/academic-manual/)³

² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/2016-21>

³ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/academic-manual/>

2. Appointing Representatives

When?

Appointment of representatives should take place during the first few weeks of each academic session, during October. Dates of the appointment period for this year can be found on page 10. Appointing representatives on time is important, as it ensures they are in place and can be trained before their first SSCC meeting. **Because training does not begin until late October, we ask that SSCCs are not scheduled until 1 November at the earliest.**

Do we need an SSCC in October for ASER reporting?

The short answer is no. The requirement is to engage with representatives to collaborate with staff in the creation and review of the ASER Development & Enhancement Plans. The Lead Department Rep should also be supported to provide a co-commentary to reflect on student involvement in the review and updating of ASER Development & Enhancement Plans. None of the above requires a very early SSCC, so you are welcome to hold the first meeting in November.

You should share the ASER data and documents with representatives once they are appointed, so they can gauge progress against the existing agreed priorities as part of the ASER cycle.

Who?

Within each Department, there should be **Course Representatives** for the following:

- At least one student from each year of study within each taught programme. (where appropriate, a student or students can be appointed to represent closely linked clusters of programmes instead.)
- At least one part-time student for each taught programme (where relevant).

For larger programmes, it may be appropriate to have more than one Course Representative for each year of study. This should be as multiple roles, rather than one shared role, as the Academic Manual states that all representatives appointed should be able to attend each meeting of the relevant SSCC.

Similarly, there should be **Research Student Representatives** to represent each distinct community of research postgraduate students within the department. Within each community, there should be at least one representative for early years students (years 1-2) and one for later years students (years 3-4).

How many Reps is the right number?

For large cohorts of students, more than one representative might be appropriate. For example, for a group of 30, one representative will be plenty. For a group of 100, there might be a good case for three representatives. We recommend around one representative for each 30-40 students in the relevant cohort.

The role of Course Rep and Research Student Rep should be seen to be important to be effective. Having large numbers of representatives devalues the role, and makes it more likely that reps will speak only for themselves rather than on behalf of the students they represent.

Please do not appoint more than one or two representatives for cohorts of only 1-50 students. The best way to accomplish this is to ensure that when setting a deadline for students to put themselves forward, there is sufficient time afterwards for a poll or election before details need to be sent to the Faculty.

The **Lead Department Representative** should also be appointed during the October appointment period. The recommended way to do this is to ask members of the relevant SSCC to select or elect the person from amongst the membership of Course and Research Student Representatives. The deadline for sending the Lead Department Rep's details is later than that for other reps in order to allow this to take place. This role should be filled prior to the first SSCC.

How?

Departments appoint their representatives in various ways. This section provides some guidance, and highlights things which will help to ensure that students are successful once taking up a role.

1. Explaining the role

Critical to ensuring that volunteers come forward is explaining the role to students early and clearly. This might mean building discussion of Academic Representation into induction talks or other introductory activity, for both new and returning cohorts of students.

In September, the Students' Union will provide publicity materials and resources through its website, as well as a video specifically to introduce the role designed for induction activities. These resources are intended to aid departments in the task of promoting the role.

2. Appointing Students to Roles

Representatives should be appointed by election unless this is not possible. Holding an election gives students a connection to their representative, ensures those taking on a role feel a greater sense of accountability to their peers, and promotes the role's importance. It is particularly important to hold an election if there are many volunteers, rather than simply allowing a larger than planned number of students to take up a representative role.

Individual students should not be appointed directly by staff without student involvement unless the role would otherwise be impossible to fill. If this is frequently the case, please do seek advice from the Students' Union, who are happy to provide support for creating interest in the role.

How can I run an Election?

Running an election for representative roles can be simple if planned ahead of time. If there is an in-person opportunity, you can download resources to do so from the [Union website](http://studentsunionucl.org/repstest)⁴. Alternatively, a show of hands might be appropriate.

Most simply, many departments make use of the Opinio platform, which requires students to log-in to vote on the available options. Guides for using Opinio can be found via our staff resources page above. Some programmes with programme Moodle pages use Moodle polls in order to allow students to select representatives instead. When holding a vote, you should circulate 50-100 words from each volunteer saying why they think they would be good at the role.

For departments using Unitu, this service includes a function for electing representatives which should be used. Conducting elections through Unitu helps students and prospective reps get familiar with the platform.

⁴ <http://studentsunionucl.org/repstest>

3. Communication within the Department

Once students have been appointed to their roles, this fact should be communicated to students and staff to help the representatives in carrying out their role. The name and contact details of the representatives should be circulated, and it may be helpful to display the names of representatives prominently somewhere physically and online (such as a Moodle page).

All new Academic Reps should be strongly encouraged to complete training arranged by the Students' Union as part of their role, as this is required in order to carry out their role effectively. The department may also wish to provide their own introduction to specific areas, such as the roles and responsibilities of local staff, meeting dates, or ongoing departmental projects and priorities.

The Lead Department Representative for the SSCC should be elected from amongst the student SSCC members in good time before the first SSCC meeting, so consider setting this process in motion as soon as possible with a physical pre-meeting, or electronically. Please remember there should only be one Lead Department Rep per SSCC.

4. Communication to the Students' Union

Submitting Academic Rep details is now submitted [online](#)⁵. This should be completed at a programme or department level. Please ensure you have the student's Full Name and UCL email address available for the SSCC they are joining.

This streamlined approach should reduce the workload for staff. If you have any questions or comments please get in touch at reps@ucl.ac.uk.

⁵ <https://studentsunionucl.org/academic-reps/add>

3. Important dates and contacts

Appointment Period

The annual appointment period is when Faculties and the Students' Union require all representatives to be in post and their details confirmed. The time available to the Students' Union and Faculties to process these details has been compressed to give Departments and Programmes as long as possible.

Returning these details on time is the only way we can ensure representatives are trained and prepared to engage positively and constructively within the department as soon as possible.

2020-21	
Promotional Materials available online	Early September
Recruitment of Academic Reps	From Monday 28 September to Friday 16 October
All details of Academic Reps to be submitted:	From 21 September 2020
Deadline for details of Academic Reps to be submitted:	Friday 16 October
Lead Department Representative Details to be sent to Faculty by:	Friday 23 October
Induction Training for Academic Reps	Monday 19 October to Friday 13 November
Faculty Welcome Events	Monday 2 November onwards

Faculty Contacts

Each faculty has a designated contact for Student Academic Representation. This person is the central point of communication in each faculty, and is the person to whom the details of appointed representatives should be provided.

Faculty	Contact Name	Email address
Arts & Humanities	Ashley Doolan	a.doolan@ucl.ac.uk
Social & Historical Sciences		
Brain Sciences	Julie Evans	julie.evans@ucl.ac.uk
Built Environment	Rebecca Payne	rebecca.payne@ucl.ac.uk
Engineering	Simon Banks	faceng.studentadmin@ucl.ac.uk
Institute of Education	Elke Theissl	e.theissl@ucl.ac.uk
Laws	Karen Scott Sarah Campling	k-scott@ucl.ac.uk s.campling@ucl.ac.uk
Life Sciences	Hazel Smith	hazel.smith@ucl.ac.uk
Mathematical & Physical Sciences	Zak Liddell Roger Gaywood	z.liddell@ucl.ac.uk r.gaywood@ucl.ac.uk
Medical Sciences	Blathnaid Mahony	b.mahony@ucl.ac.uk
Population Health Sciences	Mike Rowson	fphs.education@ucl.ac.uk

4. Students' Union Support for Academic Representatives

Faculty Welcome

Your Faculty will run an introductory event for new Academic Reps shortly after the deadline for their details to be received. This provides some contextual information about their role and the faculty, and opportunity to meet other Academic Reps.

Training

Online training for Course and Research Student Reps introduces them to the important elements of their role and asks them to consider the strategies they will utilise to fulfil them. This training encourages students to understand students' priorities, and to think about how they can work with staff to take action that will improve students' education.

Lead Department Representative and Faculty Representative Training

Lead Department Reps and Faculty Reps receive an introductory training session that covers elements of chairing meetings, leadership, and being an active and engaged member of committee meetings, as well as introducing reps to key members of staff from the Faculty. This training will be delivered with Faculty colleagues to provide greater context and insight into the Faculty and its priorities.

Other Resources and Briefings

The Students' Union also provide all representatives with access to relevant resources, including an archive of previous SSCC minutes, NSS results, PTES and PRES results, and handover documents prepared by previous representatives. We also provide briefings and reports on changes at UCL, annual processes such as ASER, and Students' Union Campaigns.

Recognition & Reward

Academic Reps may choose to have their experience recognised if they attend training and departmental meetings. This process is student led, and requires them to submit a portfolio demonstrating their active engagement with their role, including work in their department and attendance at relevant training sessions. We also run a set of annual Academic Rep of the Year Awards, which reward one winner in each faculty. Both students and staff may nominate reps in these awards.

5. Working with Representatives

Staff-Student Consultative Committee (SSCCs)

SSCCs are a dedicated forum for staff and students to discuss particular issues. Usually discussion will cover issues raised by students, and areas in which staff wish to seek input from students. Some departments choose to have open attendance at their SSCC meetings for all students. Whilst we do not discourage departments from doing this, each programme of study and year group should still have an appointed representative.

There is no ‘correct’ way to run an SSCC, but here are some simple ‘dos and don’ts’ based on what has proven effective across UCL. The list below highlights a few areas but find out more on our [staff resources webpages](#)⁶.

Do:

- **Meet more regularly if time and availability allows.** UCL’s Academic Manual requires a minimum of three meetings a year. Meeting as frequently as time allows over the year can be highly effective in ensuring a sense of continued dialogue, and in ensuring issues and actions can be followed up.
- **Think about whether the meeting feels overly formal or stuffy.** Whilst the meeting should hold importance to attendees, this does not mean the environment cannot be relatively relaxed. Aim for a meeting which feels more like a working-group than a committee.
- **Organise meetings that can be accessed virtually.** Representatives do not need to be physically there in person to contribute, especially given changes in our operating mode. Platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams can help representatives (and staff) join meetings remotely, and also offer the useful option to record the meeting and share with those who were unable to attend. More guidance is available on our [staff resources webpages](#)⁷.
- **Circulate minutes promptly after a meeting to both attendees and other students.** Minutes are important to ensure that representatives can confirm what has been agreed and communicate this to peers. They help to prevent

⁶ <http://studentsunionucl.org/rep/staff>

⁷ <http://studentsunionucl.org/rep/staff>

misunderstanding. They also ensure that students are aware that their issues are being addressed, and that students can hold their representatives accountable.

- Use the benchmarking tool available on our [staff resources webpages](#)⁸ as a diagnostic tool for improving SSCC meetings.

Don't:

- Rely on the SSCC as the sole point of engagement with students. The SSCC should act as a focal point for work with students in the department, but not form the whole of it. Focus groups, small surveys, or even open meetings on a particular topic may be useful, and representatives may be able to work with staff to arrange these.
- Use the SSCC mainly to gather feedback. Feedback is available from a variety of sources, but there are few opportunities outside the SSCC to directly involve students with interpreting feedback and identifying what should happen as a result. Partnership between staff and students means discussing solutions together, rather than staff agreeing to listen, taking feedback away, and deciding what should be done separately. Identifying students' most positive experiences and how these could be replicated is also a useful way of driving improvement to students' experiences.
- Hold a separate SSCC for each programme. Whilst inter-departmental programmes need a separate SSCC, other programmes do not. However, informal programme level meetings with reps, or open to all students, are a great way of helping keep Academic Reps and staff informed, and ensuring all students feel they have been heard.
- Hold meetings which are too large. Some departments hold SSCCs with so many representatives that some are not able to speak during meetings. Consider splitting departmental SSCCs by level of study if they are otherwise too big, to ensure that agenda items are relevant to the majority of attendees the majority of the time.
- Schedule SSCCs and other key events during teaching if it can be avoided. Whilst it's often impossible to find a time that all staff and student representatives are available, this should be minimised. Do remember that the more frequently SSCCs are held, the less important not being able to make any single meeting is for your reps.

⁸ <http://studentsunionucl.org/reps/staff>

Departmental Teaching Committees (DTCs)

Departmental Teaching Committees, or any equivalent departmental committee that deals with doctoral education, are required to include student representatives. The Lead Department Representative should be an ex-officio member of the DTC, is responsible for representing the views of students at DTCs, and for communicating items between the DTC and the SSCC. Lead Department Reps may delegate this responsibility to another student from their SSCC if required.

Remember that each SSCC will have a Lead Department Rep. If you have more than one SSCC in your department, both Lead Department Representatives should be invited. Conversely, if you have one SSCC, and more than one committee responsible for teaching/doctoral education, the SSCC Co-Chairs should identify Academic Reps from the relevant level of study to attend the relevant committee.

Working with the Lead Department Representative

The role of Lead Department Representative is intended to have a significant impact on the way academic representation operates within departments. The student in this role will jointly lead the planning and agenda-setting of meetings, helping to ensure that meetings are shaped in a way which engages student members of the SSCC, and promotes a joint community of staff and students. Co-Chairing of meetings and ensuring a student presence at Department Teaching Committee meetings will also help to embed partnership working between staff and students.

The practical steps that will help Lead Department Representatives to excel at their role are:

- Giving careful advance consideration to how the role will be appointed
- Planning and organising agenda-setting meetings between the Co-Chairs and the secretary in advance of SSCC meetings
- Ensuring the Chair of the DTC spends some time with the Lead Department Representative(s) to provide induction and context
- Sharing the department's ASER data and documents once these have been received
- Considering how Department committee meetings can be made more accessible to student members.

6. Planning Checklist

This guide is lengthy and there is lots to bear in mind. To simplify things somewhat, we've provided a practically-oriented, chronological prompt list below, for use at the beginning of the Academic Session.

Promoting the Role

When	Prompt	My Notes
Early September 2020	Is there opportunity to promote the role in pre-arrival communications for new students?	
Week beginning 28 September 2020	Is the promotional video ⁹ scheduled into induction talks for new students? Who will outline specific local arrangements for putting yourself forward for the role when the video has finished? Which publicity resources will we use to outline how to find out more about the role? How and when will these be distributed?	
Week beginning 5 October 2020	How will we draw the role to the attention of new and returning students? Are there any changes made thanks to students last year we can highlight to help promote the importance of the role? Ask any representatives who are returning to UCL whether they would like to continue for a further year.	

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpZ9lgmRPZ8>

Appointment

<p>Late September 2020</p>	<p>When is the deadline for students to put themselves forward?</p> <p>Will an email reminder be sent to students in advance of the deadline?</p> <p>Will this deadline allow time to hold an election on Opinio/Moodle/Unitu if there are multiple interested students?</p> <p>Who will pull together the required information for each representative and send these to the Faculty using the return sheet?</p>	
<p>16 October 2020</p>	<p>Deadline to submit all Representative, Research Student Representative and Lead Department Representative details through the Union website: https://studentsunionucl.org/academic-reps/add</p>	
<p>From 19 October 2020</p>	<p>Who will write to Academic Reps to let them know they now have the role, and to outline next steps?</p> <p>Who will contact our Academic Reps to ask which one would like to act as Lead Department Representative?</p> <p>How will we co-ordinate a quick election for Lead Department Rep if more than one rep is interested?</p>	
<p>23 October 2020</p>	<p>Deadline to send Lead Department Rep details to Faculty</p>	

Induction & Support

<p>From 19 October 2020</p>	<p>Who will let our reps know to expect to hear from the Students' Union, and encourage them to attend this training?</p> <p>Do we have details of our Faculty's welcome event to pass on?</p> <p>What local information should we send to representatives on what to expect over the year ahead?</p> <p>Is our first SSCC scheduled after 1 November in order to give the new reps time to be trained and talk to students?</p> <p>Is there key information on local staff roles, and how we can support communication with students which we can pass on to new reps?</p>	
<p>From 26 October 2020</p>	<p>Who will encourage the Lead Department Rep to attend Union Induction training?</p> <p>Which is the relevant Department Teaching/Research Committee the Lead Department Rep will be a member of? Who else will need their details in order to invite them?</p> <p>Does the staff SSCC Co-Chair have the Lead Department Reps' details? Have they made arrangements for setting a detailed agenda for each SSCC, and how they will communicate in advance to agree this?</p>	

Find out more at <http://studentsunionucl.org/reps/staff>

Contacts us on reps@ucl.ac.uk



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