This year our work with Academic Representatives has gone from strength to strength, as the key statistics on the right indicate. We’ve worked with more reps than ever before, right across UCL, and trained more than ever too. We’ve put in place a student leadership position within SSCCs who will work with staff to better influence and understand their department, and make their SCC a more productive space. And we’ve achieved our first (very nearly) full cohort of Faculty Representatives since we launched the role, who have been active not just in shaping faculty decision-making, but, particularly PGR reps, in improving the community for students in their departments and faculties too.

But beyond everything we can quantify, what is most exciting is the shift, in line with the 2020 Vision for Student Academic Representation, towards thinking more clearly about what we intend the outcome of representation to be. Not just looking at whether Academic Reps are in place, and filling bums on seats at meetings, but in actually thinking hard about how we can make sure the involvement of Academic Reps results in a transformative impact on the quality of all students’ experiences.

Academic Reps have the potential to be so much more than the unpaid volunteer communication interns we sometimes use them as. The roles of reps do not have value if they are simply one of half-a-dozen channels through which students give feedback to staff. Meetings between staff and reps cannot be productive if no-one present has any idea what will be discussed before they begin. The individuals in rep roles cannot make an exceptional contribution if the most restless, forward-looking, and visionary students are simply told they are not representative.

Academic Representation should be exciting. We want Academic Reps to be partners with staff in an ongoing dialogue about how their education can be made exceptional, to be involved in meetings that design and flesh-out potential changes, and (as a result) be advocates of the work their departments or faculties are doing.

Getting there will require going further still than over the last year, but I am confident that is now where we will get to. The achievements detailed in this report are already pointing us in the right direction. My time in this role is nearly over, but I am leaving full of optimism about the potential of Academic Representation to keep improving, and make the difference that UCL students need it to.

Sarah Al-Aride
Education Officer 2017-18
We worked with Academic Reps for 149 of 156 SSCCs (96%).

In the first year of the role, 72% of SSCCs appointed a Lead Department Rep, 131 reps in total.

81% of Academic Reps agreed “I was able to help bring about changes that will benefit students.”

95% of Faculty Rep roles were filled (35).

287 Academic Reps completed a handover document for their successor, up from 148 in 2016-17 (+94%).

We received 231 nominations from staff and students for our new Academic Rep of the Year Award.

1138 Course and Research Student Reps were trained this year, more than ever before.
Developing Academic Representation

Our work is guided by the 2020 Vision for Student Academic Representation, and overseen by the Student Academic Representation Steering Group, a joint UCL and Union committee. The 2020 Vision outlines our vision for “students to be partners in their education; through their Student Academic Representatives all students should be able to drive change for a world class academic experience at UCL”.

The 2020 Vision outlines thirteen priorities for improving Academic Representation, each with an accompanying programme of work overseen by the Steering Group. The priorities are:

1: Developing regulations, policy and a shared agreement on student representation and engagement provision across UCL.

2: Building a strong and supportive community of student academic representatives across UCL, with enhanced opportunities to share common interests within and across subject disciplines and levels of study.

3: Strengthening the link between representatives in departments and faculty representatives, cultivating a mutually beneficial relationship to effect change at the departmental and faculty level; and scope for a new role of lead department representative, to play a crucial role in championing staff-student partnership.

4: Reforming formal committees such as Staff Student Consultative Committees to be transformational spaces, which provide an accessible platform for staff and students to build on good practice as well as co-create and effect change to enhance the student experience.

5: Identifying and addressing barriers to participation for potentially marginalised student groups such as Black & Minority Ethnic students.

6: Enhancing our system for monitoring, analysing and reporting issues arising in departments, and the outcomes of students and staff working in partnership to resolve these issues.

7: Ensuring that the value of democracy, accountability and citizenship is enshrined in the role of student academic representatives.

8: Continuing to assess and grow the support provided to student academic representatives throughout their lifecycle to ensure they are inducted, trained, supported and recognised to provide an effective voice for students.

9: Developing support and resources to enable staff to champion and harness a partnership approach towards engagement with students.

10: Identifying and supporting departments with little evidence of effective student engagement practices.

11: Assessing the impact and effectiveness of representation for postgraduate research students.

12: Reviewing the branding and key messages for student academic representation to ensure the scheme’s values are understood by staff and students.

13: Undertaking a review of the scheme’s operating processes, to ensure these remain fit for purpose, efficient and have the confidence of staff and students.
What follows are some of the most significant pieces of work we have progressed in 2017-18.

**Review of Brand – Priority 12**

As the 2017-18 year began, the ‘StARs’ brand was retired, with more descriptive terms and role titles adopted. Our research showed that a minority of students were put off by the title, and that it risked acting as a barrier to students’ understanding of the role of Academic Representatives.

We began to refer to what had previously been known as ‘StARs’ as ‘Course Representatives’ for students on taught programmes, and ‘Research Student Representatives’ for students on research programmes. Faculty StARs became Faculty Representatives, and the new Lead Department Representative role was added. Academic Representatives is used as an umbrella term to refer to all students in these roles.

While it is difficult to enforce standardised usage across a diverse institution like UCL, our intent was to minimise misunderstanding. Anecdotally, whilst there are instances of students’ roles being known locally as ‘Class Rep’ or ‘Lead Rep’, we have not seen misunderstandings result, and no longer have instances of students (and occasionally staff) asking if local roles are different to a ‘StAR role’. Whilst fuller evaluation will take place as part of a summer survey of staff, we have encountered far fewer issues than envisioned, and are very pleased with the smooth implementation of this change.

**Revised SSCC Policy – Priority 1, Priority 4**

Staff Student Consultative Committee and academic representation policy was revised for the 2017-18 academic year, to account formally for changes in practice over the last several years, and to provide greater clarity about how the purpose of academic representation has evolved alongside our understanding of best practice in the sector.

Critically, the revised policy begins by outlining that the purpose of representation, and particularly of SSCCs, is “to enable partnership working between students and staff throughout UCL”. This closely aligns policy with the 2020 Vision. Practice at many SSCCs still focuses on these as a mechanism for the collection of student feedback, which can make for meetings which are slightly shapeless, and do not result in action. Our work over the next few years will be focused on the importance of working with academic representatives and staff to establish priorities ahead of meetings, and work together with students in meetings to arrive at what can be changed and improved. The Lead Department Representative role, also introduced as part of the revised policy, will have a key part to play in this.

**Lead Department Rep Role – Priority 3**

After two years of planning, this year we implemented the new role of Lead Department Representative. This Union and the Steering Group see this role as critical to developing practice around student representation and engagement, enabling greater joint working between students and staff both outside of and within SSCCs.

This role’s responsibilities include jointly setting the agenda of and chairing meetings alongside a member of staff, ensuring student representation on other relevant
departmental committees such as the Department Teaching Committee, and liaison with the relevant Faculty Representative.

In the first year, 72% of SSCCs appointed a Lead Department Rep. 131 were appointed in total, though some of this number represents individuals sharing a role. Whilst there is room for improvement, this is pleasing, particularly as the new role was only approved and details disseminated in July 2017.

A light-touch evaluation with students has already concluded, and evaluation with staff will take place during the summer. Feedback from Lead Department Reps was very positive. The most positive feedback from Lead Department Reps was about their involvement with Department Teaching Committees (DTCs). They spoke positively about the feed-across between their DTCs and their SSCCs, noting that this led to more informed discussion in both meetings. They also felt attendance at the DTC made them more knowledgeable about what was happening in the department, and who key members of staff were, which helped to inform SSCC discussions, and aided them in their role as Co-Chair. Taking on a more responsible role in which they discovered more about the department seemed to make the reps more pragmatic about timescales, but also more optimistic about what could be changed, and the willingness of staff to consider changes.

There remains room for improvement in the impact of Lead Department Reps on the way discussions proceed at SSCCs, which they continued to find challenging. Lead Department Reps felt it was very difficult to predict which items might be discussed, and difficult to arrive at action points based on discussions. The role is intended to proactively set agendas in advance with the staff Co-Chair (and in consultation with other reps) in order to ensure discussions are forward looking, action focused, and involve the right people. On reflection, Lead Department Reps felt they had reviewed agendas to an extent, but not taken a proactive role in shaping them.

Overall we are exceptionally pleased with the impact this role has made during its first year. We can be optimistic about the further impact this role will have as practice develops.

**Faculty Representative Forums – Priority 4, Priority 2**

As part of developing the role of Lead Department Rep, we have also been looking at how to empower this role alongside that of the Faculty Representative. Faculty Representatives report difficulty in establishing the views of students in the faculty, and a leadership role for each SSCC who can act as a point of contact is one step towards addressing this.

We have worked with faculties to ensure that from 2018-19, the Lead Department Reps and the Faculty Reps in the faculty will have at least two meetings with faculty staff during the year. This is not intended as a parallel to an SSCC, and should act as a less formal space through which staff and reps can establish dialogue, and enable departmental student priorities to feed into faculty decision-making.

**Faculty Welcomes – Priority 2**

In 2017-18, we worked with faculties to jointly welcome Academic Representatives to their new roles, replacing previous institution-wide welcome events with a similar
purpose. This was aimed at helping develop a sense of belonging to the faculty amongst reps, and providing them with more relevant contextual information than could be provided institutionally. We successfully ran nine welcome events alongside faculties, (including the Joint Faculty) and are confident we will run all ten events next year.

In 2018-19, we are also hopeful that a greater number of representatives will be in post when these events are run, and to have completed Faculty Representative elections so that these students are able to introduce themselves.
Each year through an Annual Survey of Academic Reps, we establish their perspective on how their year has been and how we can improve our support in future years. This year, we surveyed students in all Academic Rep roles for the first time, recognising that many students in Lead Department Rep and Faculty Rep roles also act as Course or Research Student Reps for their own programme.

**Recruitment, induction, and training**

Our survey evidence indicates that most Course and Research Student Reps continue to volunteer for the role, despite our efforts to encourage competitive elections. In part, this is due to not all roles being filled, though it is clear in many parts of UCL that elections are still not the norm. There appears to be a barely significant increase in the number of reps elected, but there is still much work to do. In 2018-19, we will further enhance our guidance on using generic tools, particularly Opinio and Moodle, to hold simple elections. In the medium term, we are currently exploring a number of specific third-party election platforms which we can provide as a tool to programmes and departments.

Lead Department Reps were selected in a diverse set of ways, though this was to be expected. Our guidance specified that election by all students, or election by the student SSCC membership, was the preferred option. However, we did also highlight that in year one, the most important consideration was getting a student in post. We would hope to see greater numbers of Lead Department Reps appointed with a mandate from their fellow reps in future years now that the role is bedded in.
When asked to reflect on the usefulness of information provided at the beginning of their role, Course and Research Student Reps had varying experiences of induction, support, and information. Whilst Union induction training scores strongly, this is much less positively than when reps are asked immediately following their training: 97% of reps agree that training is useful or very useful when asked at this stage. Faculty Welcomes (jointly run with the Union) and local level information is rated positively by around two thirds of students.

Lead Department Reps found their training useful in similar proportions, though a substantial number were not able to attend due to the lateness of their appointment. Lead Department Rep training ran until the third week of November in 2017-18. Where Lead Department Reps elaborated through comments and were unhappy, it was clear that one or two had attended course rep training instead mistakenly, and (correctly) did not feel that this was relevant.
Course and Research Student Reps report a less strong sense of their role being understood and their ability to shape their departments’ work than the 2016-17 cohort. Positively, an overwhelming majority of reps agreed with all of these statements, suggesting that their role remains fulfilling and impactful.

There are several reasons why answers to these questions may have declined. Turnout in our end of year survey is typically around 15-20% of Academic Reps (2017 – 223, 2018 – 275), enough to provide confidence in the thrust of the results, but meaning that annual benchmarks can be slightly volatile. Our training has also continued to add emphasis on the role of Academic Reps in contributing to departmental decisions and working with staff, perhaps leading to a wider gap between reps expectations and local practice. Lastly, a disproportionate number of Lead Department Reps completed the survey, who also act as course and research student reps. These students have borne the brunt of unfamiliarity with this role as it becomes established, and this may have informed their responses to these questions.

**Academic Reps’ thoughts on beginning the role**

“There was an informal election - my classmates suggested they supported me to be the representative.”

“I volunteered for the role as no one else put their hand up for it.”

“I definitely did not receive any training or advice from the department. The only advice I got was from the previous rep.”

“I think the union did a good job in the training sessions.”

“I think some of the training at the beginning of the year can be shortened/combined.”
Lead Department Reps were asked a similar set of attitudinal questions, with encouraging results. Lead Department Reps were more positive about their SSCCs, perhaps out of a sense of ownership. Only 10% of Lead Department Reps felt it challenging to contribute at departmental committees, though confusingly, 24% reported not being a member of these same committees, which one would expect to be a limiting factor in effective contribution.
What Lead Department Reps enjoyed most about their role:

“I feel strongly about things I care about. This school is a family and I love to have a say in improving its environment for everyone. It is so important to be engaged this way and this has allowed me to really be a part of this school.”

“Being able to bring some issues more prominently on the agenda and participate at a deeper level in the department.”

“Being able to co-chair SSCC meetings and emphasise certain important points made by students which the department may otherwise have not considered to be worthy of too much attention. I was able to see the whole picture from the students’ perspective as well as the departmental perspective and that enabled me to help effect changes which had a greater impact.”

“Making a change and getting those whose voices would not usually be heard, heard.”
Formal Recognition

259 Reps received a certificate this year, around the same number as 2016-17. Our certificate requirements map exactly onto requirements for HEAR, and undergraduate students also receive this accreditation alongside certificate recognition. This year we have significantly streamlined this process, as it has not scaled efficiently alongside the more than doubling of reps numbers over the last five years. Certificate recognition was also communicated as a strictly optional extra, rather than a baseline expectation. This expectation resulted in upset amongst students who were not eligible for certificates, and hundreds of queries.

Notably, we often previously relied on the certificate as incentive for reps to attend induction training, and this was downplayed this year to avoid later disappointment amongst those students who did not meet other requirements for recognition. Despite this, we still trained a record proportion of Academic Reps.

As in previous years, students were required to complete a reflection on their skill development, have attended induction training, and have attended two SSCCs to qualify for a certificate. This was tweaked to include asking students to also complete a handover as part of their reflection, and giving students who had not attended two SSCCs the option to provide a staff members’ details who could confirm they had been active in their role. In all cases where these were checked, staff were complimentary about the work of the students, and provided examples of other activities they had been involved with or created.

The Advanced Certificate previously issued between 2015 and 2017 was discontinued this year. This certificate was valuable in ensuring a small number of highly motivated reps completed certain activities, but added little value beyond this. We are also in the process of re-orienting our activity away from generic skill-based training towards providing personalised support for individual Academic Reps to accomplish their change objectives and make a positive impact on the education of the students they represent.

Only seven Faculty Reps put themselves forward for the Faculty Rep certificate, which retains highly specific requirements similar to the previous Advanced Certificate, such as attendance at the Union Education Conference. We will be reviewing Faculty Rep recognition in light of this ahead of 2018-19, as we aim to position our recognition processes more consistently as an opportunity for consolidation and reflection on skills, rather than an incentive system.

Handover

287 reps completed a handover, including several reps who were not eligible for certificates. This is nearly twice as many as in previous years. Handovers are collated manually over the summer and made available to Academic Reps through Moodle at the beginning of their time in the role. In 2018-19, we will also be utilising these as a useful way for Lead Department Reps and Faculty Reps to gain an understanding of student priorities amongst the broader groups of students they represent. 16 Faculty Reps have
also completed a handover this year, marking the first time we have asked students to hand over in this role.

**Academic Rep of the Year Award**

Our Previous “StAR of the Year” award attracted 16 nominations from students for Academic Reps in 2016-17, and the equivalent staff choice award only marginally more.

This year we have launched a joined up Academic Rep of the Year award, recognising one winner for each faculty, and one overall UCL winner. 232 nominations were received this year, around one third from staff and two thirds from students. The criteria for the award are focussed on the impact that reps have had on the education and wider experience of the students they represent.

In previous years our end-of-year reception has recognised students who have received a certificate. These awards were designed to replace our celebration of students performing their roles with a celebration specifically of the change that has resulted due to the work of Academic Reps. The awards were given out at the new combined Education Awards, which combined the former StARs Annual Reception, ChangeMakers celebration, Arena Celebration, Student Choice Awards and UCL Education Awards.

The winners of these awards were:

- Overall winner: Birgit Pimpel, Research Student Rep, Institute of Child Health
- Faculty of Arts & Humanities: Andrew Mok Yuan Min, Lead Department Rep, Arts & Sciences BASc
- Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment: Joanna McLean, Course Rep, Bartlett School of Architecture
- Faculty of Brain Sciences: Verlina Huang, Course Rep, Psychology and Language Sciences
- Faculty of Engineering: Evelina Vrabie, Lead Department Rep, School of Management
- Institute of Education: Melissa Navarro Angeles, Course Rep, Social Sciences
- Faculty of Life Sciences: Martha Watson, Lead Department Rep, Division of Biosciences
- Faculty of Mathematical & Physical Sciences: Teja Vaddavalli, Course Rep, Department of Statistical Science
- Faculty of Medical Sciences: Aayushi Gupta, Lead Department Rep, UCL Medical School
- Faculty of Social & Historical Sciences: Iida Kayhko, Faculty Rep (PGT)

“*The role has improved my presentation skills in terms of collecting and presenting student concerns and issues during these meetings.*”

“*I’ve become more successful at communicating between my course mates and those that I speak to at meetings, and learnt to have more patience when it comes to understanding the other point of view.*”

“*Next year I am going on a year abroad, and I am looking forward to applying the skills I have acquired at UCL, and my communication skills, developed as a rep in a different context.*”
What did reps achieve?

This year we have proactively sought out further opportunities to collect information about the work of Academic Reps, and to communicate more widely why their role is important and the impact that it has. This section presents a selection of these.

Academic Reps of the Year

These are just some of the eleven faculty winners of these awards:

**Birgit Pimpel, Research Student Rep, Institute of Child Health**

The students who nominated Birgit for this award described her as “integral to student representation at ICH” and “truly an inspiration.” She has worked to build a strong community amongst research students in the Institute of Child Health. She has had a positive impact on the social and academic life of her cohort, taking an active role in the postgraduate society, organising social events and representing students. In particular, she was recognised for her active role in organising her departmental 3 Minute Thesis heat, and research ‘golden hours’ in which students met to write together without distraction.

**Verlina Huang, Course Rep, Psychology and Language Sciences**

Verlina was nominated by students for her efforts in alleviating the effects of the industrial action taken earlier this year. Verlina worked with staff through the SSCC to express students’ concerns about the effect of the strikes on assessment outcomes, and contributed to the arrangement of solutions, including deadline extensions, and the removal of missed content from exams.

**Aayushi Gupta, Lead Department Rep, UCL Medical School**

Aayushi was nominated by both staff and students for this award, demonstrating the esteem in which she is held. As well as expertly chairing her SSCCs, she was a familiar go-to for her peers in a large and busy faculty, and took the lead in organising a ‘Question Time’ for her department, at which students can submit and ask questions directly to the people in charge. Aayushi also created a student FAQ document using students’ input, improved materials on hospital placements, and
affected real and important change to the teaching of a particular module to make sure it was safer and more patient-focused.

**Reflective Statements**

As part of the recognition process, Academic Reps submit details about what changes they felt they have been able to make that have benefited students. A few students’ examples are presented below.

There was a great deal of worry about the nature of the exams and what they would actually be covering. It was felt the first set of exams in December didn’t reflect the course content and so during the first SSCC meeting I brought this up with the faculty – they brought in many changes to the exams in the spring which was felt to be a huge improvement. This I felt was the biggest improvement I managed to bring about.

**Jonathan Marler, Course Rep, MSc Clinical Ophthalmology**

One major issue which arose was the lack of Lecturecast in certain lecture theatres. This was due to teaching taking place in pop up venues such as the Royal National Hotel. The department understood the need for all lecture material to be recorded and available to students and therefore have helped lecturers to record the audio and projector display from their own laptops.

**Kam Poon, Lead Department Rep, Department of Chemistry**

As a rep, I’ve tried to help with second years’ preparation for their dissertation. Following on from this, the SSCC decided to set up a dissertation ‘mixer’ between second and third years after Christmas. It was extremely useful for all students and we received lots of positive feedback.

**Lena Fricker, Course Rep, BA Geography**

Some concrete changes that have happened during my time as rep is that new students entering Chemical Engineering having matched their offers will receive a topic list of things that they are expected to know to smooth the transition between A-levels and University. I made this happen by raising that particular concern during the first SSCC meeting.

**Ahmed Ali, Course Rep, Department of Chemical Engineering**

**Wider UCL Impact**

With the support of our Sabbatical Officers, this year we helped two Academic Reps who approached us for support when they felt they were dealing with UCL-wide student priorities to take items directly to the Student Experience Committee.

This resulted in two papers being taken to the May meeting, one seeking the establishment of consistent UCL policy on the auditing of modules, and one asking UCL to establish graduations for overseas Master’s students earlier, at a time their student visa allows them to attend.

Both items were well received by the committee, and work is now ongoing to address these points.
This year has been an excellent year for Academic Representation, and we will be continuing to develop and evolve our support for reps in 2018-19.

**Induction & Training**
We will be building on and consolidating our joint Faculty Welcome events in 2018-19. In particular, we will be looking to include bespoke faculty information from SSCC Trends, and including more information from our training in this where possible. Our induction training will continue to outline important role-based information as at present, but we will also encourage reps to set individual goals to improve their education, and think about how to progress them.

We will also be expanding our training for students in Lead Department Rep and Faculty Rep roles along similar lines, moving beyond the basics of performing the role and asking students to reflect on what they would like to do with it.

Alongside this, we will begin including guidance to departments on basic information it is useful to provide to reps locally which we cannot provide, based on work with staff at the 2017 Teaching Administrators Conference, and results of the upcoming staff survey.

**Individual Support**
After a partly successful pilot in 2017-18, we will be aiming to meet reps to provide individual advice and support in 2018-19. We will meet with all Faculty Reps twice during the year, and all Lead Department Reps once. This will provide opportunity to advise reps on how to progress with priorities, to connect reps working on similar things, and potentially to point them in the direction of good practice examples from elsewhere.

**Postgraduate Research Representation**
We will be researching current practice around the representation of PGR students over the summer, and seeking to implement any changes during the 2018-19 session. Current feedback indicates that staff and students find it challenging to implement our current model seamlessly at PGR level, though there are many areas of UCL where it seems to work well which we can learn from.

**Barriers to Opportunity**
We are currently analysing demographic data on students to ensure that Academic Representation is open to all students regardless of their background or any other characteristic. Should our initial analysis point towards any structural barriers to participation for some groups of students, we will be working throughout 2018-19 to develop proposals to address this.

**Developing Practice**
We are currently scoping how best to network and communicate with Academic Representation ‘practitioners’ at the department level. This is aimed at both more smoothly facilitating annual operations, but also providing a platform through which we can work together with staff at the local level to implement the goals at the core of the 2020 Vision for Student Academic Representation.
Academic Representation Annual Report 2017-18

July 2018

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