



Academic Representation Toolkit

**Engaging students in the management
and review of education provision**



Academic Representation Toolkit

Academic Representation empowers students to be full and active partners in their educational experience, with a view to improving the quality of their teaching and learning. This toolkit provides some examples of ways to engage students in the management and review of their learning provision outside the traditional SSLC and PGRLF meetings, which have been discontinued as of September 2025.

Student voice activity is generally more effective when there are multiple opportunities promoting co-creation between students, the University, and the Guild. The aims and objectives of this Student Voice Partnership for co-creation can be found online in the TQA Manual ([Taught](#) / [Research](#)). The TQA chapters also include a list of the topics that should be discussed with students over the course of an academic year; those topics could be discussed during any of the activities outlined in this toolkit, or via other opportunities delivered locally by departments.

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Recommended Alternatives to Formal Meetings

This section outlines the aims and objectives of the former SSLC and PGRLF meetings, and some of the common agenda points discussed at them. Alternatives are suggested for different activities where those discussions may now take place. To avoid any pre-existing connotations, and to distance Academic Representation from the notion of a single meeting which does everything, the terms SSLC and PGRLF are no longer used.

In addition to the specific activities suggested here, we recommend that Departments engage students more broadly in ways which work best for their local community. This could include activities undertaken at discipline, programme or research group level. Details of any actions arising from discussions, whether from these activities or other sources, should be recorded in the relevant Student Voice Action Plan.

Aims and Objectives	Recommended Activities
To enable students and staff to jointly participate in the composition, management and review of the quality of education and learning provision.	<i>This is the overall purpose of Academic Representation, and not specific to one activity. This purpose is directly continued through the Student Voice Action Plan.</i>
To identify and address areas of concern to students and staff; To identify and disseminate examples of good practice.	Drop-ins with Reps in academic buildings; Student Experience forums for collecting feedback from cohorts; Ad hoc meetings between the reps and staff who are creating solutions to each individual issue.
To assist student contribution at all levels of decision-making concerning unreserved business within the Department, Faculty and University.	Focus Groups for discussion of specific topics with interested students (open to everyone, not just Academic Reps); Student Experience forums for collecting feedback from whole cohorts.
To facilitate greater communication between students and staff, including regarding actions taken in response to feedback.	Social events designed to support building the local academic community; Student Experience forums for collecting feedback from (and reporting back to) whole cohorts; Lecture and Seminar Shout-outs to share updates and outcomes.
To provide documentary evidence of the participation of students in the quality assurance and development of the programmes delivered by the Department and Faculty.	Student Voice Action Plan , with activity reviewed termly by University staff and senior student representatives.

Discussion Topics	Recommended Activities
• Teaching and seminars • Assessment and feedback • Programme organisation and management • Scheduling and deadlines • Learning resources and facilities • Personal tutoring and development • Careers and employability	Student Experience forums for collecting feedback from whole cohorts; Ad hoc meetings between the reps and staff creating solutions to each individual issue; Drop-ins with Reps in academic buildings.
• Barriers to access or learning • Equality, diversity and inclusivity	Invite students to existing meetings on this topic (such as a department EDI Committee); Ad hoc meetings between the reps and staff relevant to an identified individual issue.
• Systems of accountability • PSRB (Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Bodies) reports • External examiners reports • Departmental developments • New and revised programme developments	Focus Groups for discussion of specific topics with interested students (open to everyone, not just Academic Reps).
• Outcomes of student evaluations (including NSS, PTES, PRES) • Action plans and quality review process (TEAP, TEM, PGRQF, etc)	Focus Groups for discussion with interested students; Student Experience forums for collecting feedback from whole cohorts.
• Student-led projects and events, aimed at building research culture and academic community	Ad hoc meetings between the students and staff relevant to the individual project.
• The effectiveness of Academic Representation in the Department and/or Faculty, and the actions of the Students' Guild, Students' Union, Faculties and Departments in response to feedback.	Termly review of the Student Voice Action Plan by University staff and one or more student representatives.

The rest of the Toolkit provides more details of each of the alternative activities recommended here.

Student Voice Action Plan (Formal Reporting)

The Student Voice Action Plan is the basis for formally reporting student involvement in Student Voice activities and Academic Representation opportunities. Its purpose is to detail the actions taken in response to students' views and opinions. Each Department (for taught programmes) or Faculty (for research programmes) should produce its own Student Voice Action Plan, which is made available to all students online and submitted termly to the Faculty's senior committee for Education or Research (respectively).

- **The Action Plan should be updated following every activity undertaken as part of the student feedback process, such as those outlined in this toolkit.**
- Administrators are responsible for liaising with Department leads to keep Action Plans updated, and for submitting Action Plans to the Faculty's committees for Education and Student Experience or Postgraduate Research.
- Action Plans should be made available to all students in the represented cohorts by publishing on the University Student Voice SharePoint.

Ad hoc Meetings between Staff & Reps (Collaborative Discussion)

Introduction

Informal meetings that take place at any time, good for discussion of specific student concerns with the aim of reaching a solution. These do not have fixed membership of students and staff based on their roles, as the reps who have compiled topics which they want to discuss should be able to meet directly with the relevant member(s) of staff who are able to work with them to reach a solution regarding those topics.

Attendance can be scaled as necessary depending on need, from one-to-one meetings between a rep and an academic, to group meetings for some (or all) Reps, Officers and staff from across a programme or discipline.

Remit

- To discuss possible solutions to specific concerns and ideas raised by students.

Administration

- **Scheduling** - These can be organised directly between the student reps and relevant members of department or faculty staff when required.
- **Frequency** - Informal discussions between reps and staff should be taking place regularly, e.g. once a month (or more), so that solutions to specific feedback can be reached before the next termly review meeting takes place.
- **Reporting** - A note-taker should be appointed (e.g. one of the staff present) so notes from the meeting can be fed into the Student Voice Action Plan by liaising with the Action Plan administrator.

Student Experience Forums

(Cohort Assemblies and Town Halls)

Introduction

These are timetabled sessions for whole cohorts which are designed for the purpose of collecting feedback from a large group of students in an open-floor environment. They are usually facilitated by Academic Reps, Officers and/or department staff. Since it is often the case that students are less comfortable talking to staff directly, the most effective student forums may be scheduled by the admin team, but will be facilitated by student reps, with academics and other staff in attendance for only part of the session.

Due to the number of students in attendance, detailed discussion of specific issues is harder, but not impossible; discussion of particular topics that are of interest to the department may be easier if the session is themed (like a Focus Group), while an open floor is better for collecting new feedback. A common format for the Guild's sessions is for the first part of the meeting to be themed, based on topics pre-arranged with Reps and Officers, and the second part to be open for attendees to raise their own topics.

These sessions can also be used for staff and reps to provide feedback on activity that is ongoing, and as a showcase of solutions and outcomes from previous activities where reps and staff can "close the feedback loop" with students (i.e., provide updates on the actions taken in response to students' views and opinions). These student forums must be integrated with other feedback systems to avoid functioning in isolation.

These sessions are variously called Town Halls, Cohort Assemblies, Student Voice Meetings, or Student Experience Forums, depending on who's organising them. It is recommended to use a title that will resonate with your students; when organised by the Guild in the past, we received feedback that "Town Hall" meant nothing to them, so similar Guild events are advertised as "open discussion forums" and have been titled "Let's Talk: <topic name>" since 2020.

Remit

- To enable students to give thanks and raise concerns and ideas about their academic experience, either with staff who can take that feedback away to be addressed, or with Academic Reps who can anonymise their feedback efficiently.
- To provide updates on recent activity by staff and reps, thereby "closing the feedback loop" and promoting the ongoing work of student representation.

Administration

- **Admin support** – Can be provided by the Academic Representation team at the Students' Guild if Department support is not available. Guild staff can also help promote the event to students.
- **Scheduling** – These forums should ideally be scheduled into student timetables or Outlook calendars, usually by the admin staff supporting the meeting.
 - Can be held in person or online – whatever is best for students.
- **Recommended frequency** – Once or twice per term per cohort group, based on best practice by departments and faculties which already hold sessions like this (including the Business School and Medical School).
- **Reporting** – Facilitated by staff and reps. Facilitators should take notes that can be recorded in the Student Voice Action Plan and brought to other meetings.

Focus Groups (Thematic Discussion)

Introduction

Focus groups are one-off meetings open to all students in a relevant cohort (not just to Academic Reps and Officers), set up and designed to collect feedback about a specific topic of discussion. By being open to anyone, these sessions may draw an audience of students who are interested in the discussion topic, and therefore have the chance of being more productive than a meeting where only student reps are invited.

These are ideal for getting opinions on topics that staff want to investigate and review, but not as useful for collecting feedback on the day-to-day student experience. These are recommended instead of meetings with Academic Reps for discussion of regulatory requirements, external reports, Teaching Excellence Action Plans, PGR Quality Review, systems of accountability, and new programme developments, as Focus Groups may draw an audience of interested students who are different from the team of reps.

Financial and/or food-based incentives are recommended to encourage participation!

Remit

- To collect and discuss views and opinions from students about topics that are of interest to the Department or Faculty.

Administration

- **Admin support** – Staff who want to run a Focus Group should contact the Student Experience team or PGR Support team in the first instance.
- **Scheduling** – Focus Groups should be scheduled directly into timetables or Outlook calendars wherever possible by the admin staff supporting the meeting.
- **Frequency** – This will depend on when items for discussion arise throughout the year. This will likely average at once or twice per term.
- **Reporting** – Minutes of the meeting should be taken so they can be fed into the Student Voice Action Plan.

Socials and Drop-ins (Coffee Mornings, Pizza Evenings)

Introduction

Informal activities designed to enable students to meet with their reps, and to enable reps to compile feedback from students. This can include scheduled events in a seminar room, pop-up stalls in an academic building foyer, or “office hours”. For any of these formats, the inclusion of refreshments provides an incentive for students to stop by.

Socials such as coffee mornings and pizza evenings provide an informal setting for students to raise issues with reps with the added incentive of refreshments. These provide excellent opportunities for detailed discussion of views and opinions with students, but less so for discussion of solutions with staff. Depending on the nature of the community, these could be more or less effective if staff are also in attendance.

Drop-ins target the “captive audience” of students waiting for lectures as well as the footfall of students going about their academic work. Note that drop-ins would be less effective in a social building, where students are generally going somewhere and not thinking about academic work.

Remit

- To enable students to meet with their Academic Reps and Officers to discuss any concerns, ideas and thanks they have about their academic experience.
- To enable reps to directly discuss views and opinions with students.

Administration

- **Admin support** – Available from the Guild's Academic Representation team.
- **Scheduling** – Organised and facilitated by Department Officers or PGR Officers with support from Guild staff to book rooms and promote to students.
 - These should be advertised as student voice events so they can be distinguished from socials, and to promote the work of student reps.
- **Recommended frequency** – as often as possible, and at least once per month!
- **Reporting** – Notes should be taken by the reps facilitating the session so any actions can be copied into the Student Voice Action Plan.

Shout-Outs (Lectures, Research Seminars, Tutorials)

Introduction

A short timeslot (5 minutes) at the beginning of an existing timetabled session (lecture, research seminar, workshop, tutorial, etc) for Academic Reps and Officers to provide introductions to their role or updates about their work.

The main purpose of this activity is to allow reps to promote themselves and their work by closing the feedback loop – telling students about the work that they have done makes reps known to their students, and should encourage students to bring more feedback to them in the future.

It could also be possible to collect feedback during shout-outs if using a pre-prepared template through a platform such as Mentimeter, where students scan a QR code to access the input form and submit feedback directly. 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.

Remit

- To promote the existence of Academic Reps and Officers, and the methods by which students can raise any issues, ideas and praises they have about their academic experience.
- To provide updates on the work done by student reps and staff in response to student feedback.

Administration

- **Scheduling** – Organised directly by student reps with lecturers, seminar leaders or module tutors.

PGR students attend research seminars as well – shout-outs should not be discounted as an activity that can only be done in taught programmes!

Termly Review Meeting (Oversight)

Introduction

A formal meeting between staff and student representatives. Staff attendees would usually only include the Director of Education and Student Experience or Director of Postgraduate Research (or nominated deputy), and the administrator responsible for the Student Voice Action Plan. Student attendees would typically only be Department Officers or PGR Officers. A member of staff from Professional Services, such as the Department Manager or PGR Manager, may also attend if necessary to discuss topics related to programme administration and support services.

The main purpose of these meetings is to review the Student Voice Action Plan for the Department or Faculty, and ensure that actions have been recorded (and progress is being made) in response to students' views and opinions. Review meetings are intended for updating progress on existing issues, and not for extended discussions or raising new issues – refer to Ad hoc Meetings, Student Experience Forums and Focus Groups earlier in the toolkit for activities where these discussions can take place.

Academic Reps are not required to attend these review meetings, but should ensure discussions they have had with staff are updated in the Student Voice Action Plan prior to these meetings taking place. Department Officers and PGR Officers should attend to ensure they have oversight of the actions that have been taken, and to provide updates on behalf of the team of Academic Reps in their respective Department or Faculty.

Having a student Chair for this meeting is optional. A student Chair can be any student representative who has completed Chair training. The meeting administrator should liaise with student attendees who have completed Chair training before each meeting to ask if someone would like to chair that meeting. If no one wishes to, then the meeting will be chaired by a university staff member (usually the DESE or DPGR).

Remit

- Creation and oversight of the **Student Voice Action Plan** for the Department (taught programmes) or Faculty (research programmes).
- To review and report on the activities and effectiveness of Academic Reps, Departments and faculty staff in response to student feedback.

Administration – Taught Programmes

- **Admin support** – Student Experience Coordinators (LXI).
- **Recommended frequency** – three times per year (usually once per term).
- **Timing** – Should be scheduled such that any Student Voice Action Plans can be reported to the Faculty's Education and Student Experience Committee.

Administration – Research Programmes

- **Admin support** – PGR Support Administrators (Doctoral College).
- **Recommended frequency** – every four months, including once during the period June–August to ensure continuity of representation over the summer.
- **Timing** – Should be scheduled such that any Student Voice Action Plans can be reported to the Faculty's Postgraduate Research Committee.

Other Formats

Advisory Boards and Student Panels

Similar to Focus Groups, Advisory Boards and Student Panels are a series of meetings on a specific theme held throughout the year with a broadly consistent membership of students at each session. Panel members only share their own experiences, and do not represent other students, but the selection process for members draws from across the student body so the panel as a whole is demographically representative. Some form of remuneration, such as a gift voucher, is a staple of this format.

Digital Platforms

Digital feedback platforms exist to provide a single location for 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 may also provide a platform for tracking progress, assigning actions to specific staff, and closing the feedback loop, thereby positively reinforcing their effectiveness as a feedback tool. With administrative support, digital platforms also provide a ready-made source of feedback and solutions for formal reporting in the Student Voice Action Plan, and it is recommended that Reps and Officers promote existing platforms rather than collecting feedback themselves.

Surveys

It is wise to keep survey usage to a minimum, as most other activities are generally more beneficial. 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.

Live Collection

Live feedback collection, through a platform such as Mentimeter, may be more efficient than using timed surveys, as students can be encouraged to participate directly during a lecture or seminar using a QR code displayed on screen. Mentimeter specifically also has the ability to show responses in real-time using a built-in presentation, allowing quick wins to be addressed immediately. Note however that moderation is minimal, and depending on the format of the slide, anything students write could appear on screen.

Emails

Generally, sending emails to students is not an effective means of engagement, particularly when prompting students to provide their views and opinions. The primary use of emails and newsletters would be to close the feedback loop with students (but not alone – the feedback loop should be closed through other methods as well).

Social Media

Setting up group chats on social media specifically for the purpose of representation is not particularly effective, but where reps are engaging with existing group chats for specific cohorts, effectiveness is much higher. There have also been requests for “official” academic discussion platforms for reps, students and staff supported by the Guild and the Uni – Viva Engage (previously Yammer) might be appropriate for this, but would require more promotion since students are not generally active on that platform.



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