

rgu:union



ROBERT GORDON
UNIVERSITY ABERDEEN

PARTNERSHIP

at RGU

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE
HANDBOOK**

2017/18

INTRODUCTION

I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as a student representative. This is an extremely important role for students and for the university, and I look forward to your contribution to the RGU community.

The university constantly needs to improve what it does, and in doing so it greatly relies on student feedback. As a student representative you will play an important role in letting us know what you and your classmates think we are doing well and should continue, and where we can improve your experience.

My very best wishes for the year ahead as a student representative. I hope you will find it a rewarding experience, that you will see the improvement you can make to the student experience, and that you will gain valuable skills as well.

Ferdinand von Prondzynski

Principal and Vice-Chancellor at RGU



Welcome to your journey to becoming amazing student representatives. This is the Union's key mechanism to represent your academic interests. In partnership with the University, students and RGU:Union have made lots of significant changes over the past few years.

We have put together this handbook to give you all the information you'll need about being a representative, how you can gather the feedback of your classmates and how to use the mechanisms available to help you make as much change at RGU as you can. Remember to regularly check moodle!

Good luck with your year as a representative, and remember you are always welcome to get in touch if you have any questions.

Kerry Harrison

President of Education and Welfare at RGU:Union
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Key tasks for student representatives



Training

- Sign up for and attend appropriate on-campus and complete electronic training for the role
- Find out important information about your course such as who the course or module leaders are, how often rep meetings are, previous rep feedback and more.
- School Officers
- Student Rep Connect

Gathering Student Feedback

- Make yourself known to classmates and staff, perhaps through e-mail, social media or speaking in class.
- Regularly encourage your classmates to give feedback. This could be in general, or about particular topics. Use a range of methods from e-mails, social media, classroom activities and more.

Work with Other Representatives

- Introduce yourself and get to know your Student School Officer and the Presidents at RGU:Union, and remember to raise relevant feedback to other representatives.
- Speak with other student representatives, perhaps similar issues exist elsewhere, or perhaps other courses have examples of positives ways you could improve an issue.

Attend Key Partnership Meetings

- Attend and raise academic issues at your course or school staff-student partnership meetings.
- Attend and share your feedback at other committees, workshops and meetings, including RGU:Union's Student Voice and the annual Meeting with the Principal.
- Attend Partnership in Action

Take Action

- Plan the change you want to see made and work with other reps, RGU:Union officers and staff to take action and work together to make change.
- Being a rep doesn't always have to be serious, why not plan a social event or night out for your classmates?

Communication

- Look out for key updates and communications from RGU:Union to find out updates on changes which may be happening.
- Regularly communicate back to your classmates any updates on feedback, achievements or campaigns which may affect them.
- Routinely check the Campus Moodle reps page

Recognition

- Log any volunteering hours from your role, and be sure to fill in application forms for the various award and recognition schemes run by RGU:Union and the University.



STUDENT PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

First things first, the role of student representatives is encompassed by the Student Partnership Agreement that exists between the University and Union. This agreement exists because we believe that **‘through working in partnership between students and staff we can create a vibrant learning community’** at RGU. Through engaging students at all levels of decision making, the University can ensure that the quality of courses and experience of students can be made better.

The agreement identifies all the different ways that the student voice shall be represented within the Union and University. There are three key parts of the agreement:



Part One identifies the various roles and mechanisms that exist for students to work in partnership with staff and express their feedback.



Part Two details specific themes which both the University and Union agree to work together on during a given session in response to student feedback and to help deliver enhancements.



Part Three celebrates everything that has been ‘achieved in partnership’, feeding back to the wider community the improvements that have been made.

Each year, the University and Union look at your feedback and decide which two themes are our priorities for the coming year. In 2017-18, the themes are:

- Student Voice
- Wellbeing & Resilience

Student Representative Role

Part 1 of the Student Partnership Agreement details all the roles and mechanisms available for listening to student feedback. Student representatives are the main contributors to part 1 of the agreement and are the collective voice of students at RGU and work with the Union and University to support the culture of partnership.

What do student representatives do?

As a rep your role is to **“continuously improve the student learning experience in partnership with the University and RGU:Union by sharing feedback from your classmates and helping create solutions.”** In practice, that means spending around an hour a week speaking to your peers about both positive and negative feedback they have, sharing this with staff at the university, attend various student representative meetings, and keep your class up to date on what is happening due to their feedback.

What do I get out of being a student representative?

Student reps have the power to make significant changes to university life and improve the experience of students. You will also be given unique training opportunities, and develop transferable skills such as communication, leadership, and problem solving. Reps are also rewarded with volunteering hours and other award schemes, such as Engagement & Partnership Awards.

What do student representatives not do?

Remember that it is not your responsibility to support students who turn to you for help if stressed or in difficulty. Reps are not trained to help with any disputes or academic misconduct issues, or any finance, welfare or health issues. You may listen to peers in confidence, but do not act or provide advice.

If students come to you for help with any personal issues, refer them to: Student Services at the Student Help Point: studenthelp@rgu.ac.uk

RGU:Union’s Advice and Support team at: advice@rguunion.co.uk

RGU:Nightline from 8pm – 8am on 01224 26 36 46.

*** TOP *
* TIP ***

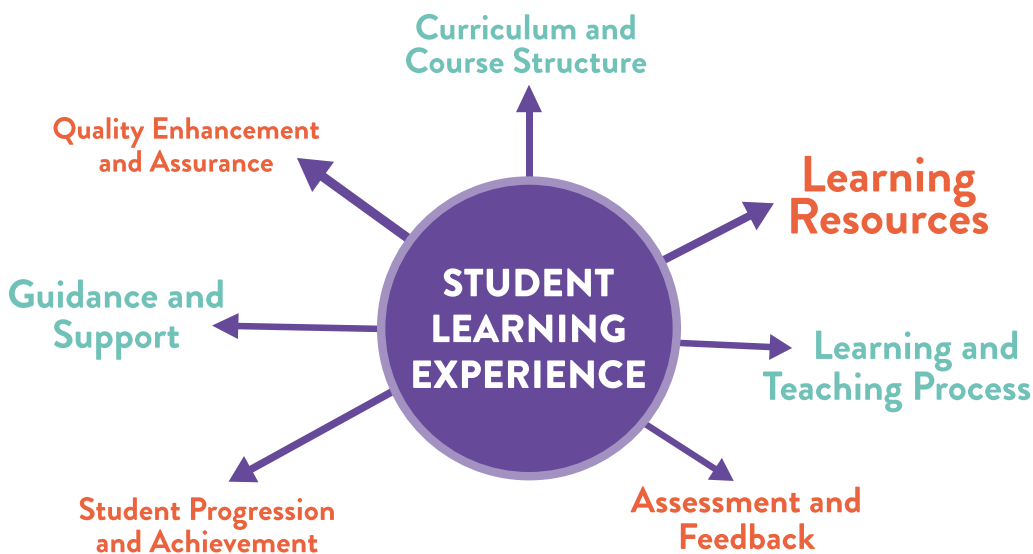
Speak to the Careers and Employability Centre about making the most out of being a student representative for your CV or in a job interview.

Types of Feedback

The core part of being a student representative is gathering feedback from students. There are a wide range of areas where you can get feedback. You can use these areas to target feedback on a particular topic, or understand the types of feedback you are getting and take it to the right place. The two main areas that student representatives should gather feedback on are the 'student learning experience' and the 'student experience'.

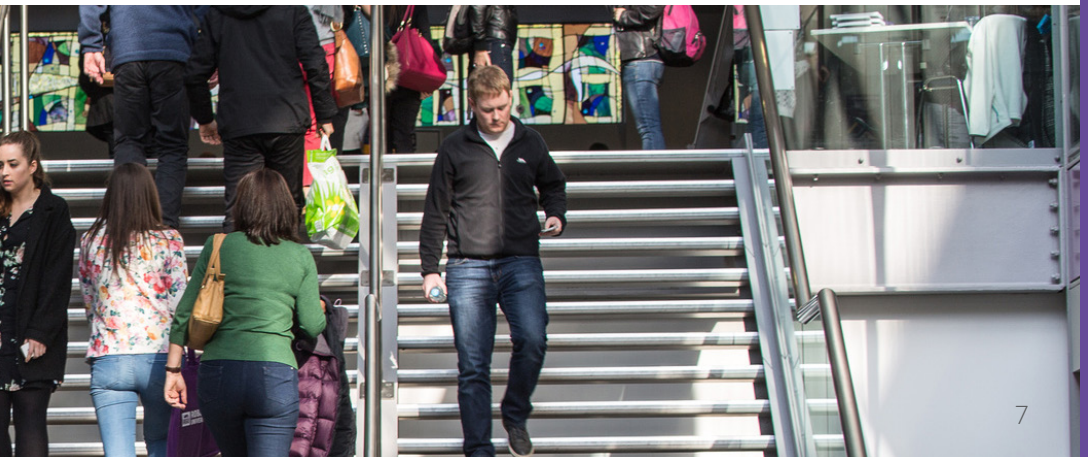
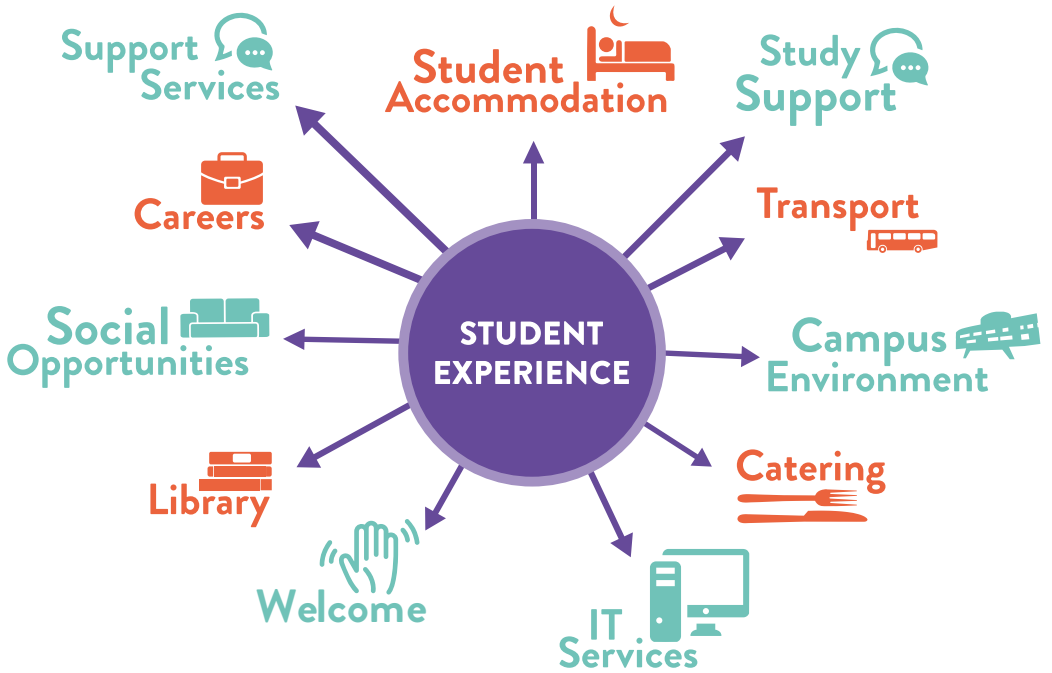
Student Learning Experience

This is all about your academic experience and how you learn and are taught. The topics in this area are making sure that you get the highest quality education possible and the specifics about the way your course is taught is what you expected.



Student Experience

This is about the wider aspects around university life from the various support services, the campus environment, catering, IT facilities, social activities and more. The topics in this area are about giving you positive memories and the appropriate support and environment you need to be able to learn.





ABCD of

Effective Feedback

Accurate

When providing feedback you should try and be specific and give evidence of what you are discussing. You should try and avoid generalisations or emotional language and aim to provide a factual account of student feedback.

Balanced

It is important that you are providing fair and balanced feedback. This means presenting feedback in a fair way, encompassing both positive and negative comments. You should have a fair view of positive and negative views from a range of individuals to ensuring accurate and balanced feedback.

Constructive

Student reps do not just identify problems, but help find solutions too. Part of collecting constructive feedback is encouraging your classmates to provide improvements or solutions to issues raised and trying to consider what they would like to see happen.

Depersonalised

Student feedback is a brilliant way to consider the positive elements and potential for improvements within your course and the university in general. Feedback should focus on the wider impact and general practice rather than an individual.

Gathering Student Feedback

Once you are trained up and ready to go, the next step is to speak to your classmates. Being able to communicate effectively is one of the key elements of your role, you must consider the students in your class and the needs they may have. Try and represent the collective views of multiple students to give you more credibility and be truly representative. The more people to speak to the more you can represent the class as a whole, as with some issues you may just be representing a small group of students with a specific problem. Remember to gather not just negative feedback, but positive feedback too, so that staff know what is going well and should continue.

Tips for Gathering Student Feedback

- Start by introducing yourself to classmates and staff and give them your contact details. If your classmates are familiar with you they are more likely to approach you. Ask your course leader to post your details on Campus Moodle, or post in your class Facebook page. Remember to make sure you speak to all the tutorial groups you represent, not just your own.
- Speaking in a lecture or tutorial is a good way to inform students of up and coming meetings and seek their views. All you have to do is speak to your lecturer or tutor.
- Send an e-mail to your class with updates and questions. You can either look for your course e-mail, or ask your course leader to send it out on your behalf.
- Communicate through social media, such as posting a poll in a Facebook group, messaging students, running a short survey.
- Run activities in your classroom, such as asking students to write feedback on post it notes during a class, or pass a sheet around with a question for students to vote or write feedback on. This is a good way to gather feedback without speaking in public.
- Use online tools such as Campus Moodle or Blackboard or other methods to post questions, provide updates or get feedback.
- Communicating with other reps is a way of finding out what issues are going on around the university. You can use the Student Reps area on Campus Moodle or use the Student Rep Facebook group.



Raising Feedback

After considering the types of feedback you're looking for, and you've spoken to your classmates and gathered the feedback, it's now time for you to raise that feedback. As a student representative, you have a huge number of ways that you can share that feedback, and it's important to know the right place to go with your feedback in order to get the right results. At all levels of the university, there are a range of individuals and mechanisms you can use to address issues.



Question	Student Contacts
Is your feedback specific to your module or course?	Student Representatives: Issues related to modules and courses are the responsibility of student representatives. It may be useful to discuss issues with fellow representatives to fully understand the issues.
Is your feedback relevant to a range of courses in your School?	Student School Officers: If you think an issue might affect a range of students in your school, then it might be worth speaking to your School Officer. These are senior student representative who look after entire schools and work to act off feedback and run projects to improve issues that affect a whole school.
Is your feedback relevant to a specific aspect of the student experience across the university?	Student Presidents and Vice Presidents: If there is a particular area of the student experience such as catering, IT or the library where you would like to raise an issue, then it might be worth discussing this with the student Executive at RGU:Union. Each elected President or Vice President has a different remit and may be able to address these issues at the meetings they attend.
Does your feedback affect all students across the University?	Student Presidents: At RGU:Union, there are three full-time Presidents. You are always welcome to speak to and raise feedback with your Presidents as they are responsible for being the voice of students at the highest level of the university.



Staff Contacts

Course Staff: It is your module coordinators and course leaders who would deal with feedback about your course. You can arrange a meeting or send an e-mail to your course staff to try and resolve issues on the spot.

School Staff: The bigger issues that affect a range of courses can be brought to the attention of school staff, which may include course leaders, but also school management such as Head of School.

Department Staff: There are a range of different teams and departments who look after different elements of the student experience. These staff would deal with the areas of feedback, however it is often difficult for student representatives to know who to speak with. Feedback on these issues is best raised through RGU:Union or specific meetings.

University Executive: The senior management at the university, including Principal, Deputy Principal and Vice Principals are responsible for significant issues that affect the entire university community.

Meetings

Student Partnership Mechanisms: You will be invited to meetings or workshops by your school to discuss academic issues. Sometimes referred to as ‘Staff-Student Liaison Committees’, these meetings are a chance for students to raise issues specific about your course and any aspects of the ‘Student Learning Experience’.

School-Level Meetings: Each school does it differently, but there will be a chance to raise broader issues at school level meetings, which may be the same as staff-student partnership mechanisms, or may include School Management meetings.

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Can also be raised at Student Voice

Meetings with Senior Management: Reps annually have the opportunity to meet with senior management, where students can raise feedback about broad issues about the university as a whole.

Can also be raised at Student Voice

Raising Feedback

Student Voice

This is the core democratic body for RGU:Union. If you have feedback or issues that affects your school or the university, it is important to raise these concerns to Student Voice. This is a forum that meets four times a year, and gives students the power to submit and vote on ideas about what they want their Union to work on. If you have a change you would like made, raise it with Student Voice, it will be voted on by a range of students and if passed, it will become part of the work of RGU:Union. You can also get updates on the work the Union is doing, what is happening with any feedback raised and vote on big decisions about the changes you want to see at RGU or RGU:Union.

For more info visit :

rguunion.co.uk/studentvoice

Tips for Raising Feedback

Formality

- Remember that not all feedback has to be given formally. Part of the partnership culture is that all students can raise feedback with staff at anytime.
- All students are also given the chance to annually raise feedback through key surveys such as the Student Experience Questionnaire and National Student Survey, which student representatives should help promote.

Meetings

- It is useful to read the notes of previous meetings (usually called minutes and agenda) to find out the types of issues that have been discussed.

- Some meetings may have papers you have to read in advance and take to the meeting. If you want these printed, speak to RGU:Union or you could ask to borrow an iPad for the role. It may also be worth speaking to the Union in case you want to arrange a meeting with a staff member to go through the papers if there is information you don't understand.
- Many agendas will have specific items for student reps where they will be invited to provide feedback, so consult others and note down what you want to discuss.
- Be sure to send apologies to the Chair of the meeting if you can't make it.
- Make your points clearly and positively with balanced comments to make sure your views are taken on board.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions at meetings. Occasionally there will be terminology that you don't understand, so it is important that staff know you understand.

- When raising feedback, try to consider solutions and what you think your desired outcome is. Negative comments for the sake of being negative won't result in as much action, as a clear enhancement.

After Meetings

- Once the meeting is over, take a note of what was discussed and any outcomes. Be sure to feed this back to your classmates and RGU:Union and share any successes you were able to achieve. Make sure RGU:Union is aware of any changes made from your feedback for the 'Achieved in Partnership' campaign.

Acting on Feedback

Part 2 of the Student Partnership Agreement outlines how the union and university will act on feedback provided through student surveys, representatives, meetings and Union officers. Each year there are a number of areas where the Union and University decide to work together around specific projects that will improve the student experience.

Student Partnership Enhancements

Within part 2 of the Student Partnership Agreement, there are a number of objectives both looking at developing the implementation of the partnership agreement, and key enhancements that the Union and University would like to see made to the student experience. These objectives are often developed looking at themed topics arising from student feedback data and areas needing development. Over the past few years, objectives have focused on:



Building social atmospheres to improve the community on campus, and developing more on-campus events, improving social areas such as introducing new picnic benches, new furniture and developments on Union Way.



Student identity looking at how students experiences are affected by the identity they have in courses, schools and at the university and any issues they have from that identity and the positives and negatives of the experience as that identity, hosting workshops and research.



Distance learning is also an area that was explored, with introductions of new technology, more video streaming and the launch of Connected newsletter.



Assessment and feedback where student representatives undertook research to improve and develop the quality of feedback from courses.

Student Facing Services Review

Another way in which the university acts on feedback is with the student facing services review, where the university explores a key area of student life, and engages students in gathering feedback, developing actions and outlining areas of improvement for that service. In the past, the reviews have focused on IT Services and Work Related Experiences. This results in various changes from improvements to wi-fi, introduction of printing hubs, improvements to IT helpdesk or better communication about IT issues. Student reps are invited to a number of focus groups and meetings during these reviews to improve quality.

Union Campaigns

RGU:Union is run for students, by students. Your Voice is one of the key strategic areas of the Union and all students are automatically members. The elected Executive ran on manifesto aims of areas they want to see changed based on student feedback. The Union officers work to listen to feedback and regularly run campaigns, lobby the university, discuss with management and press for changes in all areas of University or Union life.

Part Three:
Impact
of your
Feedback

ACHIEVED *in* PARTNERSHIP

Achieved in Partnership

Part 3 of the Student Partnership Agreement outlines the success and achievements made from partnership activity.

Achieved in Partnership

The ‘Achieved in Partnership’ campaign aims to raise awareness of all the changes that have been made as a result of student feedback. It is important that we recognise the impact that the student voice can have on improving life at RGU.

Over the past few years, student representatives have made a huge amount of changes including:

- Created a new social space on Union Way
- Developed actions for assessment and feedback enhancement across all schools
- Moved exams before Christmas
- Timetabling is now a priority in an RGU-wide enhancement project
- 24 hour library during exams

Recognition

Another way we celebrate achievements in partnership is through rewarding and recognising the work of student representatives through our various award schemes. The University and Union deeply values the contribution made by student representatives at all levels, and aims to provide a number of tangible benefits to thank students for volunteering their time.

Volunteering hours can be claimed for being a student representative, along with work for societies, sports clubs and other projects. Students can be awarded for any number of hours, and can also register hours for national Saltire Award Schemes. Information can be found in the ‘Get Involved’ section of the Union website (www.rguunion.co.uk).

The Extra-Curricular Award is a credit rated module which aims to formally recognise the range of extra-curricular activities which students engage in. Many activities out of the classroom result in personal growth and development which deserve recognising.

Student Partnership and Contribution Award schemes are additional awards run by RGU and RGU:Union which seek to reward students for making significant contribution to improving the learning experience.

Higher Education Achievement Record is a new formally recognised transcript you are given when you graduate. The student representative role is now able to be included on your HEAR report based on approval from the School.

Useful contacts

Student Presidents

Kerry Harrison

President (Education and Welfare)

presew@rguunion.co.uk 01224 262297

Michael Ife

President (Communication and Democracy)

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Christopher Robb

Applied Social Studies

Lana Campbell

Health Sciences

Zainab Olatunji & Tahir Rashid

Pharmacy & Life Sciences

Shannon McManus & Kene Okafor

Nursing & Midwifery

Valerie Forbes

Aberdeen Business School

Sarah Millar

Creative & Cultural Business

Laura Watt & Taylor Morrison

Law School



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