



2012/13

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE HANDBOOK



**ROBERT GORDON
UNIVERSITY • ABERDEEN**

www.rgu.ac.uk

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.

Over the following pages you will find out more about how you can be effective as a student representative, how you can ascertain the views of your classmates, and how you can make the most of the meetings you attend.

Your School, the university and the Students' Association value your input, and want to know your ideas and those of your class.

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



Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski
Principal and Vice-Chancellor



STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE ROLE

Student Reps act as a bridge between the students they represent and the University staff. As a Student Rep you have a positive role to play, by enabling communication to find out what is working well within your course and/or School and also what could be improved. This may be in relation to teaching, learning and assessment or to facilities and services within the University.

Student Reps have the following specific responsibilities, to:

- **Undertake training** for the role (as appropriate)
- Make yourself available, and **gather the views, concerns and opinions of classmates**. Remember that positive comments are useful – it helps the University to recognise good practice.
- **Attend and participate in Staff-Student Liaison Meetings.**
- Attend and participate in other Committee meetings, if appropriate.
- **Give feedback to members of your class** following meetings and to communicate to them any other matters of interest.
- Be aware of the activities of the Students' Association.



It is important to try and represent the ideas of your class as a whole. This gives you more credibility and it is the only way that you can be truly representative. You should consider the different students in your class and the different needs they may have. On some issues you are representing the class as a whole, whilst at other times you might be representing a small group of students from your class with a specific problem.

Every School has mechanisms for Staff-Student Liaison in place. Normally these take the form of on-campus meetings held at least once per semester. However if you are a distance learning or part-time student these may be online discussions, or forums.

You will also be invited to attend, or input, to various other meetings during the year perhaps with the Head of your School or Dean of Faculty. The Principal of the University also holds annual meetings to hear at first hand any issues Student Reps may wish to raise, as well as any good practice that might benefit from being disseminated more widely.

You will also be contacted via Campus Moodle, from time to time, to alert you about matters of interest or request your opinions on certain issues.

In undertaking the role you will gain valuable experience for the future and also develop a range of skills which you can build upon further during your time at University and beyond.



COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH CLASSMATES AND OTHER REPS

Being able to communicate effectively is one of the key elements in your role. There are many resources available within your School/department to help you do this.

- It's important to introduce yourself to your classmates, as well as to staff, and let them know how you can be contacted. If the members of your class are familiar with you, they are more likely to approach you and you will be better able to gauge the feelings of the class.
- Lecturers/tutors are usually happy for you to address your class or tutorial groups. This is a good way of informing them of any upcoming meetings and seeking their views.
- A full list of Student Reps, across the University, is available via the *Student Involvement and Representation* Campus Moodle area.

- You can use the *Student Representative* Campus Moodle Area to contact other reps quickly and easily and to gather opinion on the issues which concern students in your area.
- A listing of student membership of University Committees is also available within the above moodle areas.
- You can also request that a Campus Moodle teamwork area be set up for you and your classmates to communicate directly with each other. Contact campus@rgu.ac.uk (or **01224 262233**).
- Schools may also make additional resources available to you. For example noticeboard space, or photocopying could be requested – contact your School Office for information.

RGU: Union Structure

It's useful to be aware of the representative structures within RGU:Union and who you are most likely to communicate with:

- **Sabbatical Presidents** are elected each session and have core areas of student life they are responsible for. Respectively, they cover;
 - > Communications and Democracy,
 - > Education and Welfare, and
 - > Sports and Physical Activity
- **Part-time Vice-Presidents** are also elected, however unlike the Presidents, they carry out their roles while continuing their studies.
- An **Undergraduate** and **Postgraduate Governor** are elected for the university and represent the student body on the Board of Governors.
- **Student Faculty Officers** are appointed through an application process. They represent the students of their respective Faculties and work closely with both the Faculty Deans and RGU:Union. They sit on University Committees, as well as on Union committees which report to the Executive Board.

One of the most effective ways in which Faculty Officers can elicit the views of such a large number and range of students is through the Student Rep network. Therefore, expect to be contacted by your Faculty Officer to discuss any issues that may be most appropriately addressed at Faculty level or through RGU:Union's representation structures. Faculty Officers are also in a good position to offer you ongoing support, often drawing upon their own experience as representatives and their wider networks.

Further details can be found at:
www.rguunion.co.uk/union/officers/



COMMITTEE STRUCTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY

This table opposite provides details of the University committee structure, and how the Student Rep role feeds into this.

The University has different committees covering various areas of concern. As a Student Rep your main channel of communication will be via Staff-Student Liaison mechanisms, which in turn feed into various other committees.

Staff and Students	There are around 15,000 students studying within the University and in principle all courses, and each stage, appoints a Student Rep.
Staff Student Liaison Mechanisms	Every School has mechanisms for staff-student liaison in place and normally this takes the form of scheduled Staff-Student Liaison meetings. Some are more formal than others but these meetings are considered by both staff and students to be very useful and effective in implementing improvements. As well as raising problems or issues, it is also useful to make positive comments at these meetings, to ensure that good practice is recognised and noted. Feedback on actions taken as a result of student feedback will also be discussed.
Course Programme Management Teams (C/PMTs)	C/PMTs consider any issues which are arising from the Staff-Student liaison meetings. Staff-Student liaison will be a standing item on the agenda even if there is no formal business to report. The team also discuss issues relating to a wide range of academic activity, such as the development and delivery of the teaching and resource issues relating to the operation of the course.
School Academic Boards (SABs)	SABs deal with matters referred up by C/PMTs. They also deal with many other business matters, such as the annual appraisal of courses, course changes and liaison with professional/industrial groups. If the views you have identified are similar to those of other reps across the School the committee will be able to identify trends and any required actions.
Faculty and University Committees	<p>In the main, most issues that you raise will be resolved at C/PMT and/or SAB level. However there are also a large number of committees in the University which look at areas of student concern and which would also deal with issues which require a more institutional response. The majority of these committees have student representation and elected members of RGU:Union sit on the highest University committees – Academic Council and Board of Governors.</p> <p>Further information is available at: www.rgu.ac.uk/academicaffairs/committees/</p>

TYPES OF ISSUES

The following list gives you an idea of the types of issues that might be raised, and which you might want to consider yourself – remember you can be proactive as well as reactive!

Course Structure and Curriculum

This may include such things as subject elements within your course and the amount of time given to them in lectures and tutorials. Find out what other members of your course think and use your position as a Rep to reflect their views and influence the shape of your course!

Teaching and Learning

Staff will present information in a number of different formats. Ask for students' views on their learning, and aspects which they particularly enjoy, or think might benefit from being improved.

Assessment and Achievement

Are you and your classmates happy with the balance and the amount of assessment in your course? Are there

any issues relating to speed and return of feedback that you would like addressed? It is useful for staff to be aware of students' thoughts on assessment and the way it is implemented.

Learning Resources

Is book/journal provision in the libraries adequate? Are there difficulties with large numbers of students looking for the same text at the same time to meet essay deadlines? If so, speak to staff and students about this and bring it up at Staff-Student Liaison meetings.

Student Progression and Achievement

Is the content relevant to your future career expectations? The student perspective of this is important to future delivery.

Quality and Standards

When decisions are made about how the course is delivered are the views of students taken into account to help shape improvements? Are you aware of actions that have been taken in response to student feedback?

Social Events

You may wish to organise social events, however, make sure you contact relevant staff to make them aware (they may well be able to help!). Inviting speakers with an interest in your field of study can be a valued and interesting addition to the formal course.

PARTICIPATING IN MEETINGS

The following provides some tips to help you effectively contribute to meetings (or their alternatives):

- Above all, **consult the students you represent**. It is important to ensure that the views you will present are shared.
- **It is useful to read the notes of previous meetings** (usually called Minutes) to find out the types of issues discussed and any actions which were agreed. Refer to the Agenda for details of the topics for discussion at each meeting.
- **Give some consideration to what you wish to raise beforehand**, and to any issues you may be asked to respond to.

- It may be worth discussing items with the other Student Reps who attend before the meeting, perhaps via the Campus Moodle area or by meeting up. What do they see as the issues that need to be raised? **Make sure that your comments are balanced**, and if possible back them up with any evidence you may have.
- There will usually be **a specific item on the agenda where Student Reps will be invited to give their opinions**.
- Depending on the issues likely to be raised, you may wish to **consult other people involved in the meeting**, to assess their opinions and to give you an opportunity to put across your point of view before the actual meeting.
- In some cases, particularly when a large or controversial matter is to be discussed, it might be worthwhile to **write a paper** for consideration. In most cases a formal paper is not necessary, however RGU:Union can assist with writing and layout if required.
- Don't be afraid to **ask questions**. This often a very valuable way

of contributing and staff should not presume that you know, or understand, all of the terminology which might be used.

- A **positive and constructive** attitude offers the best approach towards meetings.
- Afterwards, you should ensure that you **feedback to classmates** the discussions that took place, and make them aware of any outcomes which might affect them.

FEEDBACK

You should receive feedback on any issues you raise directly at School meetings either from members of staff or through meeting notes (minutes).

It is helpful to ensure your classmates are aware of these to demonstrate that their views are taken seriously and acted upon where possible.

Also look out for '**You Said, We Did**' posters across the campus which highlight where changes have been

made, at an institutional-wide level, as a result of student feedback on central services and facilities.

RECOGNITION

The University values the contribution made by Student Reps and awards all Reps with a certificate at the end of their year of service in recognition of their contribution.

In addition all students are invited to engage with the following, and the Student Rep role may be an element which you could choose to include within your evidence base:

- The *Student Involvement and Contribution Awards* scheme which aims to recognise students who have made a significant contribution to improving the learning experience.
- The new *Extra-Curricular* credit-rated module which aims to formally recognise the range of co-curricular activity which students engage in, beyond the formal curriculum, and the personal growth and skills

development derived from such activities. [Further details will be issued by the Study Skills and Access Unit during Semester 1.]

In addition the role is also expected to be included within *Section 6.1 Additional Information of the new Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)*. This is likely to be based on minimum requirements and further details will be communicated as soon as possible.

You might also wish to consider registering as a '**volunteer**'. You can log volunteering hours for activities undertaken within this role and work toward certificates to recognise the time you have contributed. For further information contact Lydia Fyall, Student Development and Volunteering Co-ordinator at l.fyall@rgu.ac.uk or on **01224 262265**.

Continuity of Representation

It may seem a long way off – but if you think you will consider being a Student

Rep the following year it will be important for you to track any issues you present at meetings and follow these up as you progress to the next stage of your course.

Likewise if you do not plan to continue the role it is important for you to pass on any outstanding issues on to the next Rep and try to ensure continuity of representation between academic years. Perhaps you could compile a short summary of your actions and the methods of communication you found worked best with your classmates.

Interested in getting involved in other representative opportunities?

The University welcomes student involvement in a number of processes. If you are interested in representing the views of students more widely, for example at University-wide committees, or perhaps by participating in discussions regarding actions in response to student feedback please email studentinvolvement@rgu.ac.uk



HELP AND SUPPORT

Help and support is always on hand and available in a number of ways, from:

- Your School, perhaps from your Course Leader or Personal Tutor.
- You may wish to contact other reps to find out their opinions through the *Student Representative Area* on Campus Moodle. This area also contains a number of useful resources such as a glossary of useful terms, timeline and bite size chunks of training materials.
- The RGU:Union will be happy to give you advice on any matter. Contact: Callum Martin at **presew@rguunion.co.uk**, or drop in to the office in the Union at Schoolhill, or Kaim Cottage at Garthdee.
- Also please remember that the Academic Affairs Department can be contacted for advice and support, should you be experiencing any specific difficulties (at **studentinvolvement@rgu.ac.uk**; or **01224 262158**).

CONCLUSION - RGU:UNION

Being a Student Representative grants you an amazing opportunity and immense power to shape and change the student experience within our University. Student Representatives play a vital role in communicating the concerns and views of the student body to University Staff, committees and the Union; this gives you the opportunity to create change in the way the University makes decisions benefiting all students.

Recently Student Representatives have been vital in helping get increased opening hours in the University libraries, increasing access to study space and IT facilities and improving transport links to the Garthdee campus. Clearly, Student Representatives are vital where we wish to make a massive difference!

At the Students' Association (RGU:UNION) we provide support for Student Representatives in tackling issues affecting students throughout the year. We are here to make sure that you get the most out of your time as a Student Representatives and ensure that

you are never alone on any changes you wish to see take effect. If you have any questions about your role please don't hesitate to contact me at **presew@rguunion.co.uk**. If you choose to take the most of this opportunity as a Representative then the outcomes and benefits of the role will be huge. The effort you put in is equal to what you get out of the role.

Congratulations to each of you for starting on a journey that maintains students as a partnered decision making body of the university.



Callum Martin President (Education & Welfare)



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