

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
STUDENT REPRESENTATION SYSTEM POLICY

Index of points

1. Introduction
2. Purpose
3. Core Principles
4. The Student Representation System Structure
5. Role of Student Representatives
6. Key Requirements
7. Reporting Structures

Student Representation System Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Student Representation System (SRS) is a partnership between the University of Birmingham and the Guild of Students. The aim of the SRS is to ensure that every student at Birmingham is effectively represented to the University and the Guild by a fellow student. It is founded on the belief that through effective representation students become partners in their education, allowing a more active involvement in, and ownership of, their learning.
- 1.2 The document comprises a set of essential precepts for student representation across the University which must be adhered to by all parties in the University and Guild of Students.
- 1.3 Further guidance for carrying out the precepts is available from the Guild of Students and/or the Academic Quality Unit. Please contact studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk for additional information.
- 1.4 In particular, if the implementation of any aspect of the Policy proves challenging, please contact the Guild of Students and/or the Academic Quality Unit promptly in order to discuss possible solutions.
- 1.5 This Policy applies to all Registered Students, including those undertaking programmes defined in the University's Regulations as research degree programmes. In this Policy "Postgraduate Researcher" means a Postgraduate Registered Student undertaking a research degree programme.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The Student Representation System Policy sets out the joint commitment of the University of Birmingham and the Guild of Students, so as to ensure that the SRS is run effectively throughout the University and is founded on effective practice.
- 2.2 It is intended that this Policy will be used to direct University staff and the Guild of Students to establish the relationship within which both will operate. This Policy will also be made available to all student representatives.

3. Core Principles

- 3.1 Students' feedback on their University experience is integral to quality in higher education institutions. The University and the Guild of Students are committed to providing effective structures for student feedback and representation. Both parties will work jointly in ensuring these systems provide for the assurance and enhancement of quality.
- 3.2 The core value of student representation is that every student on every course at every level has the opportunity to impact on their student learning experience.
- 3.3 The Student Representation System (SRS) is the physical manifestation of the aforementioned joint commitment to student representation at the University. The SRS is run in equal partnership between the University and the Guild of Students in order to deliver academic student representation throughout the University.

3.4 Below is a list of core principles for student representation across the University:

The University and Guild Collaboration

- 3.4 .1 The University will provide appropriate levels of academic and administrative resources to facilitate student representation locally in Colleges and Schools.
- 3.4 .2 The Guild of Students will build and enhance relationships within Colleges / Schools and provide resources and expertise to facilitate and promote representation across the institution.
- 3.4 .3 The Guild of Students and the University will work together to respond to feedback from students in order to enhance the quality of the student learning experience at the University.
- 3.4 .4 There will be a joint University / Guild Committee, designated the Student Representation System Advisory Board (SRSAB), with over-arching administrative responsibility for delivering the core principles of student representation.

Representation within the University Structure

- 3.4 .5 Staff – student interactions, which occur through Staff Student Committees (SSCs) and student representation on relevant internal committees, should be present at School and College level.
- 3.4 .6 Students should be represented on relevant institutional committees, as agreed between the Guild and the University.
- 3.4 .7 Representation structures need to have a clear linear path to feed information up and down through the University.
- 3.4 .8 Effective practice should be shared throughout the University.
- 3.4 .9 There will be clear supplementary information relating to the SRS which will outline how the SRS functions across the University. This will be reviewed by the SRSAB at regular intervals.
- 3.4 .10 The SRSAB will report into the University's academic quality assurance and enhancement processes.
- 3.4 .11 The SRS will inform the Guild's work with respect to academic representation.

4. The Student Representation System Structure

- 4.1 The structure of the SRS conforms to the core principles outlined above. Please see *Figure 1* for a diagram of the structure.

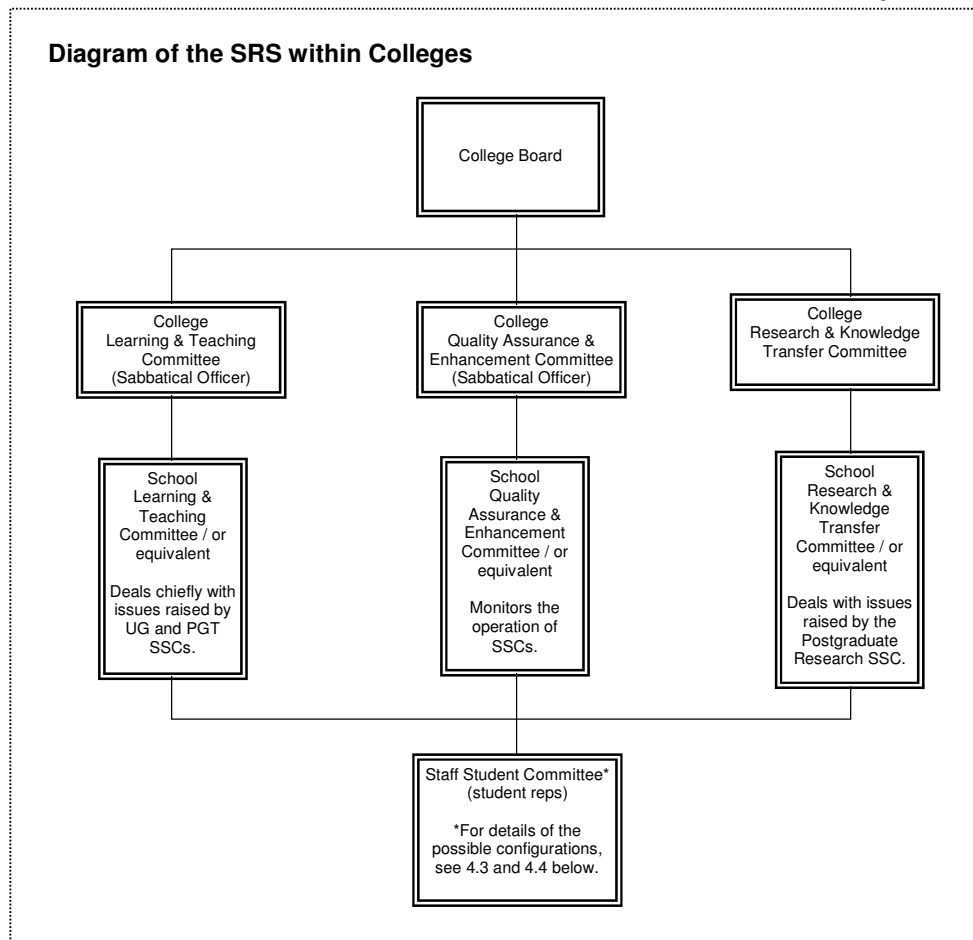


Figure 1. Diagram of the SRS within Colleges.

- 4.2 The structure of the SRS facilitates two-way communication. It provides a formal route for feedback from students to the Department, School, College and University, and also a route for consultation and communication with the student body.
- 4.3 It may be appropriate for SSCs to exist at the level of a single programme or cognate group of programmes, or at the level of a Department or other sub-School level unit (e.g. there may be separate SSCs for Undergraduate students and Postgraduate Taught students). In this situation, student representatives on sub-School level SSCs may elect members for a School-level SSC.
- 4.4 It is strongly recommended that a separate Postgraduate Research SSC is maintained within the structure to ensure that postgraduate researchers' representation needs are met while reducing conflicts of interest related to postgraduate researchers teaching within Colleges. This Research SSC may be at a Department / School Level or at College level depending on the number of postgraduate researchers.
- 4.5 It is recognised that variants from the agreed model may be appropriate for some constituencies. Where the operation of a different model is proposed, this should first be agreed with the SRSAB (contact studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk) in a timely manner, and then the approval of the College Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Committee should be sought.

- 4.6 It is expected that College Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committees will annually agree the number and level of SSCs in the College for the following academic year, and will report this to the SRSAB in the Summer Term.

5. Role of Student Representatives

- 5.1 Student representatives provide the peer representation essential for the SRS to succeed. They have three key responsibilities:
- 5.1 .1 To be responsible for gathering student opinion and presenting this in an appropriate and objective form to University Staff and the Guild of Students.
 - 5.1 .2 To be responsible for providing constructive feedback to University staff and work in conjunction with them to reach workable and mutually satisfactory solutions for students.
 - 5.1 .3 To be responsible for feeding back to their fellow students responses from the University regarding issues raised.
- 5.2 This Policy assumes that the SRS can only be effective if the student representatives carry out all of their responsibilities.

6. Key Requirements

- 6.1 The key requirements for the effective operation of the SRS across the University are as follows:

6.2 Staff Support

- 6.2 .1 The Head of School, or specified nominee (e.g. School Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement), will be responsible for:
 - 6.2 .1 (a) ensuring that an academic staff member is allocated to act as the Staff Liaison Contact (SLC) for each Staff Student Committee (SSC);
 - 6.2 .1 (b) ensuring that all staff new to the role of SLC will be provided with a thorough induction to the SRS and their role. The Guild of Students will be prepared to assist in this induction if required, and will do so upon request (contact studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk);
 - 6.2 .1 (c) notifying the SRSAB (contact studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk) when a new SLC is appointed;
 - 6.2 .1 (d) ensuring that members of staff are allocated to provide administrative support for the SRS at the appropriate level;
 - 6.2 .1 (e) annually agreeing the number of student representatives required on each Staff Student Committee (SSC) with the SLC;
 - 6.2 .1 (f) ensuring that SLCs have access to External Examiner report(s), the School's NSS action plan, and summaries of the outcomes of the annual programme review and postgraduate research annual review processes

(see 6.5.2).

- 6.2 .2 The SLC will be responsible for:
 - 6.2 .2 (a) the recruitment and election of student representatives at the appropriate level, in accordance with section 6.3;
 - 6.2 .2 (b) coordinating the SSC. This will include arranging meeting dates and venues, and informing all attendees of these details, distribution of minutes to the student representatives, etc.;
 - 6.2 .2 (c) providing the first point of contact for the student representatives, and providing the first point of contact for the Guild of Students in Colleges and Schools;
 - 6.2 .2 (d) writing and submitting the Annual SSC Report to the SRSAB, in collaboration with the student representatives;
 - 6.2 .2 (e) submitting the full minutes of every SSC meeting to the appropriate School committees and the School Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement;
 - 6.2 .2 (f) besides the formal Annual Report (refer to Section 7), writing and submitting reports, as determined by the SSC, to the College Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and / or College Learning and Teaching Committee on matters of concern;
 - 6.2 .2 (g) liaising with the Guild of Students with regard to student representation issues.
- 6.2 .3 The SRSAB will host two forums per year for all SLCs (in October and March). These forums will cover:
 - 6.2 .3 (a) an introduction to the Guild of Students Vice President (Education & Access) and the PVC (Education), and to staff of the Guild and the Academic Quality Unit responsible for administering the SRS;
 - 6.2 .3 (b) an outline of recent changes and developments within the SRS;
 - 6.2 .3 (c) key dates in the SRS cycle, including those for the election of representatives, training sessions, and reporting dates; and
 - 6.2 .3 (d) an opportunity to provide feedback about the SRS, to discuss implementation issues that Colleges face with regard to the SRS, and to share effective practice.

6.3 Recruitment and Elections

- 6.3 .1 During the student induction / re-induction period, the principles of student representation at the University of Birmingham, and the role of student representatives, will be explained to students. It is at this time that recruitment of student representatives will usually occur. However, where appropriate, student representative elections for continuing cohorts may be held before the end of the academic year for the following academic year.

- 6.3 .2 Upon request, the Guild of Students will attend induction lectures and initial meetings with student cohorts to speak about student representation and the SRS. Staff can arrange these meetings by emailing: studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk.
- 6.3 .3 Students will be informed that, once elections have taken place, SLCs will ask student representatives to complete a Student Representative Contact Details Consent Form, which will enable SLCs to share the contact details of student representatives with the Guild of Students.
- 6.3 .4 All student representatives will normally be democratically elected by those that they are to represent (their peers). Elections will be free and fair, and the election process will allow for full representation of the diversity of students within the School (including part time and distance learning students).
- 6.3 .5 A specific date and time will be determined for the election to be held, and publicised to students at least five working days prior to the election in order to allow time for students to volunteer themselves and / or nominate other students for student representative places.
- 6.3 .6 If, after the close of the nomination period, the number of volunteers / nominees for student representative places is less than or equal to the number of places available, all volunteers / nominees will automatically become student representatives. Any student representative place not filled during the election period will preferably be filled by a new election process or, alternatively, may be filled by the co-option of additional student representatives by the existing student members of the SSC.
- 6.3 .7 All student representatives at School level will be elected or co-opted, at the latest, by the end of October (for September intakes) or the end of January (for January intakes). It is the responsibility of the SLC to ensure that the democratic election of student representatives occurs.
- 6.3 .8 The Guild of Students will assist Schools in running elections upon request (contact studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk). An Elections Guidance document can also be obtained from the Guild of Students.

6.4 Training

- 6.4 .1 The Guild of Students will provide all student representatives with a handbook. The handbook will explain the SRS, the role of student representatives, and provide tips for successful representation.
- 6.4 .2 The Guild of Students will be responsible for training student representatives, and all representatives will be expected to undertake appropriate training.
- 6.4 .3 The Guild of Students will provide information regarding how to access the training to student representatives and SLCs, and it is expected that SLCs will promote the training within their areas.
- 6.4 .4 Upon request the Guild of Students will provide bespoke training for cohort groups. Staff can arrange this by emailing studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk.
- 6.4 .5 A Training Guidance document, which can be obtained from the Guild of

Students (contact studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk), provides more detail about the available training and development opportunities for student representatives.

6.5 Staff Student Committee (SSC) Meetings

- 6.5 .1 Formal student feedback will be provided by student representatives through SSCs. These committees will be free to discuss topics related to learning and teaching at the University, which may include the content and quality of programmes and modules, assessment methods, learning and teaching methods, feedback on assessed work, student support, learning resources and facilities, etc. (this list is not exhaustive).

Within the context of its legitimate discussions, the committee must not engage in unduly personal discussion of:

- Individual staff members;
- Individual students.

The committee must not discuss:

- Personal complaints/grievances.

Should these topics arise, the SLC must inform students of the appropriate mechanisms through which to raise these issues, and arrange an alternative time to discuss them (if necessary).

- 6.5 .2 At least once per year, the committee will discuss:
- 6.5 .2 (a) Section A of the External Examiner reports relevant to the constituency represented by the SSC (Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught SSCs only);
- 6.5 .2 (b) the subject-specific report of NSS results (available from www.unistats.direct.gov.uk), together with the School's NSS action plan (Undergraduate SSCs only);
- 6.5 .2 (c) a summary of the outcomes of the annual programme review (Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught SSCs) or postgraduate research annual review (Postgraduate Research SSCs) process.
- 6.5 .3 The positions of Chair and Secretary of the committee may be offered to student representatives. Should no student accept either of these positions, the SLC will act as Chair and a member of support staff will act as the Secretary in the first instance, but students who might be interested should be referred to the available Chair and Secretary training. The offer of the positions of Chair and Secretary may then be offered to student representatives at a subsequent meeting.
- 6.5 .4 SSCs will meet at least once per term, and at least three times per year. Dates and times for scheduled meetings should be agreed with all attendees soon after the election of representatives, but not later than the conclusion of the first SSC meeting of the academic year. All scheduled meetings should be publicised to all representatives, and should be attended by all student representatives and the SLC

- 6.5 .5 At least one meeting in the Summer term should be provided to discuss and agree the committee's annual report to the SRSAB, unless an alternative means of agreeing the report is determined by the SSC.
- 6.5 .6 Any member of the committee may call an additional meeting when required. The request should be accompanied by a clear outline of the purpose of the meeting, and should be seconded by two other members of the SSC. The SLC will be responsible for ensuring that all members of the committee are aware of the time and date of the additional meetings.
- 6.5 .7 Minutes of every meeting will be taken by the SSC and made available to all members. The minutes will also be disseminated through appropriate means to the student body, highlighting the actions taken in response to issues raised.

6.6 Resources

- 6.6 .1 Dedicated facilities and resources will be made available within appropriate academic areas for use by those involved in the SRS (including the student representatives). These facilities can be used for advertising who the student representatives are, publicising meeting dates, and asking for and gaining feedback.
- 6.6 .2 Facilities and resources should include:
 - 6.6 .2 (a) a dedicated notice board;
 - 6.6 .2 (b) access to photocopying and filing space for committee related work;
 - 6.6 .2 (c) access to meeting rooms to hold student forums and drop-ins;
 - 6.6 .2 (d) access to all student email lists (through Admin Manager if necessary);
 - 6.6 .2 (e) the opportunity to speak to students at the end of lectures for publicity purposes.

7. Reporting Structures

- 7.1 For items arising out of SSC minutes needing immediate consideration and action it may be appropriate for issues to be taken to the School Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) or equivalent, or the College LTC. It may also be appropriate for issues arising from Postgraduate Research SSC minutes to be taken to the School Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee (R&KTC) or equivalent, or the College R&KTC, if it is not possible to address particular issues at LTCs. In these cases Schools and Colleges should ensure that any resulting action is reported back to the SSC.
- 7.2 SSCs will also provide their minutes to the School Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement. The School Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement will regularly report to the College Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) on the operation of SSCs within their School. College QAECs may ask to see copies of SSC minutes where specific issues needing attention have arisen.
- 7.3 SSCs will also report to the SRSAB through the completion of an Annual Report to be completed in the Summer Term. The Annual Report will address operational

matters and include a summary of issues considered by the SSC during the academic session.

- 7.4 The SRSAB will summarise the responses received from Annual SSC Reports to produce College-level reports for both College QAEC and College LTC.
- 7.4 .1 College QAEC will assure the operation of the SRS is in accordance with this Policy.
- 7.4 .2 College LTC will monitor the academic issues arising from the SRS, and take action as appropriate.
- 7.4 .3 Both College QAEC and College LTC will provide feedback to the SRSAB on action taken as a result of issues raised in the College-level reports.
- 7.5 The SRSAB will report to the University Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee formally through an Annual Report to be presented to the October meeting. The SRSAB may be asked to report activities to other University QAEC meetings throughout the year.