

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
STUDENT REPRESENTATION SYSTEM POLICY

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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 / postgraduate researcher¹ at Birmingham is effectively represented to the University and the Guild by a fellow student / postgraduate researcher. It is founded on the belief that through effective representation students / postgraduate researchers become partners in their education, allowing a more active involvement in, and ownership of, their learning / research.
- 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 Registry. 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 Registry 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. The generic term "student representative", which is used throughout this Policy, is also intended to encompass postgraduate researchers who represent their peers.

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 / research experience.

¹ Refer to 1.5 for a definition of the term "postgraduate researcher".

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 / research 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.

Diagram of the SRS within Colleges

College Board

College-level committees

- Committee(s) with responsibility for education or, for Postgraduate Research SSCs, responsibility for postgraduate research provision to deal with issues raised by the SSC which cannot be addressed at School level (see paragraphs 6.2.2(f) and 7.1)
- Committee with responsibility for quality assurance to monitor the operation of the SSC (see paragraph 7.2)

School-level committees

- Committee(s) with responsibility for education or, for Postgraduate Research SSCs, responsibility for postgraduate research provision to deal with issues raised by the SSC (see paragraphs 6.2.2(d) and 7.1)
- Committee with responsibility for quality assurance to monitor the operation of the SSC (see paragraphs 6.2.2(d) and 7.2)

Staff Student Committee*

*For details of possible configurations, see 4.3 and 4.4 below.

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. Additionally (or perhaps alternatively in cases where a

Department / School has only a small number of postgraduate researchers), it may be appropriate for one or more student representatives to attend the Department / School committee with responsibility for postgraduate research provision (or equivalent).

- 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 committee with responsibility for quality assurance should be sought.
- 4.6 The Student Representation System Advisory Board will keep a record of all Staff Student Committees within the University and, if there are any changes to the number and level of SSCs in the College, it is expected that the College committee with responsibility for quality assurance will be asked to approve the changes.

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 and other matters discussed at SSC meetings (for example, see 6.5.2).
- 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. the School's quality assurance lead), 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 to ensure an appropriate range of representation, so that the size and make-up of the SSC reflects the size and make-up of the cohort(s) represented (e.g. in terms of students from different programmes, part-time students, international students, etc.)²;
- 6.2 .1 (f) ensuring that SLCs have access to External Examiner report(s) and responses, the School's NSS action plan, and summaries of the outcomes of the annual programme review and annual postgraduate research 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 to the SSC, in accordance with section 6.3;
 - 6.2 .2 (b) providing a Department / School level handover and induction for new student representatives, in accordance with 6.5.5;
 - 6.2 .2 (c) providing the first point of contact for the student representatives;
 - 6.2 .2 (d) coordinating the SSC. This will include arranging meeting dates, times and venues, and ensuring that all attendees are aware of these details, distribution of minutes to the student representatives, etc.;
 - 6.2 .2 (e) submitting the full minutes of every SSC meeting to the appropriate School committee(s) and the School's quality assurance lead (see 7.1 and 7.2);
 - 6.2 .2 (f) writing and submitting the Annual SSC Report to the SRSAB, in the Summer Term (see 7.3), in collaboration with the student representatives ;
 - 6.2 .2 (g) besides the formal Annual Report, writing and submitting reports, as determined by the SSC, to the College committees with responsibility for quality assurance, education and, if necessary, postgraduate research provision on matters of concern which cannot be addressed at School level (see 7.1);
 - 6.2 .2 (g) liaising with the Guild of Students with regard to student representation issues.
- 6.2 .3 The SRSAB will host one forum per year for all SLCs (in September / October).

² In terms of size, 'an appropriate range of representation' should be taken to mean that the ratio of Student Reps to students represented should be at least 2:<80, with one further Student Rep for each additional forty students in any constituency. However, this is only a guide, and each SSC will be asked to consider whether its size and make-up reflects the size and make-up of the cohort(s) it represents during completion of the Annual Report in the Summer Term (see 7.3).

This forum will cover:

- 6.2 .3 (a) an introduction to the Guild of Students Vice President (Education) and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), and to staff of the Guild and Registry 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 expected that elections will take place between the beginning of Week Two and the end of Week Five of the term. (In the Autumn Term, when the majority of elections are expected to take place, the Guild will provide central marketing for the recruitment / election process during these weeks.) However, where possible, it is recommended that student representative elections for continuing cohorts are held in the Spring or Summer Term for the following academic year.
- 6.3 .2 Where possible, the Guild of Students will attend induction lectures and initial meetings with student cohorts to speak about student representation and the SRS. Staff can request 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 via BIRMS (Banner Interface Records Management System).
- 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 will be elected or co-opted, at the latest, by the end of Week Five of the Autumn Term (or Spring Term if the cohort (re-)commenced studying in January). 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 All representatives will be expected to undertake appropriate training:
 - 6.4 .2 (a) The Guild of Students will be responsible for providing centrally-organised training to student representatives. In particular, student representatives taking of the roles of Student Chair or Co-Chair of the SSC will be invited to attend a specific face-to-face training session. Specific training for student representatives taking on the role of Student Secretary of the SSC will also be available upon request (email studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk);
 - 6.4 .2 (b) SLCs will be responsible for providing a Department / School level handover and induction to new student representatives (see 6.2.2(b) and 6.5.5).
- 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 If, for any reason, student representatives are unable to attend the scheduled training, the Guild of Students will provide bespoke training for particular groups upon request. Staff / student representatives 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, and provision for postgraduate researchers, at the University. This may include the content and quality of programmes and modules, assessment methods, learning and teaching methods, the provision of research skills support for postgraduates, feedback on assessed work, student support and / or supervision, learning resources, facilities, and study space, 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) the External Examiner reports and School responses 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 unistats.direct.gov.uk), together with the School's NSS action plan (Undergraduate SSCs), the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) results and the School's / College's action plan (Postgraduate Taught SSCs), or the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) results and the School's / College's action plan (Postgraduate Research SSCs);
- 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 will be offered to student representatives. It is compulsory for each SSC to elect either a Student Chair or a Student Co-Chair, who shares to the role of Chair with the SLC. As soon as the Student Chair / Co-Chair has been identified, SRSAB should be notified of their name via email (contact studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk) in order for them to be invited to attend the appropriate training.
- 6.5 .4 SSCs will normally meet at least once per term, and will meet formally at least three times per year. All meetings should be attended by all student representatives, the SLC and other staff members of the SSC.
- 6.5 .5 In the Autumn Term, in addition to the formal meeting, the SLC will meet informally with all student representatives as soon as they have been recruited. This informal meeting should be used to agree the dates and times for formal SSC meetings, to elect a Student Chair / Co-Chair, and also for the SLC to provide a Department / School level handover and induction for new student representatives (in accordance with 6.2.2(b) and 6.4.2). The handover / induction will involve:
- providing new student representatives with the Annual Report (see 7.3) from the previous year;
 - a short briefing by experienced student representatives (where possible);

- an introduction to the staff members of the SSC;
 - an explanation of the committee structures within the Department / School, including quality assurance and feedback processes;
 - any other local information which will help student representatives to carry out their responsibilities (e.g. a staff email contact list, where this has not already been provided in the Department's / School's Student Handbook).
- 6.5 .6 The SSC may also find it helpful to also schedule other informal meetings throughout the year (e.g. on a weekly or fortnightly basis), in order to ensure that student representatives may raise issues with the SLC in a timely manner, and receive prompt feedback on issues raised previously. Guidance relating to the practice of holding regular informal SSC meetings is available from the Guild of Students (studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk).
- 6.5 .7 At least one meeting in the Summer Term should be provided to discuss and agree the SSC's annual report to the SRSAB, unless an alternative means of agreeing the report (e.g. via email circulation) is determined.
- 6.5 .7 A Subject Librarian shall be invited to attend each SSC at least once per year. Contact details of Subject Librarians can be found here: <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/libraryservices/library/subject/index.aspx>.
- 6.5 .8 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 .9 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, one of the uses of which should be the advertisement of student representatives' names and email addresses to the student body;
- 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 or College committee with responsibility for education or, for Postgraduate Research SSCs, the School or College committee with responsibility for postgraduate research provision. 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's quality assurance lead. This individual will regularly report to the College committee with responsibility for quality assurance on the operation of SSCs within their School. This committee 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 a College-level report for each College's Director of Education, who will take appropriate action in response to the academic issues arising from the SRS, and assure the operation of the SRS is in accordance with this Policy.
- 7.5 The SRSAB will also provide the College-level reports to the University Education Committee (UEC) in the Autumn Term.
- 7.6 UEC will receive feedback from Directors of Education on action taken in response to issues raised by the College-level reports, and will also determine if any University-level action is to be taken.
- 7.7 Students will be provided with feedback relating to the action taken by Colleges and the University, and SSCs will discuss this feedback during the Autumn Term.
- 7.8 UEC will then review progress made against the agreed College and University level actions in the Spring Term.