UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

CODE OF PRACTICE ON THE STUDENT REPRESENTATION SYSTEM

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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 researcher 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 should be adhered to by all parties. The parties are; the University of Birmingham, the Guild of Students and all registered students at the University of Birmingham. In this Code of Practice "postgraduate researcher" means a Postgraduate Registered Student undertaking a research degree programme. The generic term "student representative", which is used throughout this Code of Practice, is also intended to encompass postgraduate researchers who represent their peers.

2. Purpose

2.1 The Student Representation System Code of Practice 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.

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.

3.3 The Student Representation System (SRS) is the physical manifestation of the 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 occur through Staff Student Committees (SSCs) and student representation on relevant internal committees including the relevant learning and teaching, programme approval and quality assurance committees. This will be at all levels: central, College and School/Dept.

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 Information relating to the SRS which outlines how the SRS functions across the University 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.

3.4 .12 Student Representatives will be full members of the boards and committees on which they represent students at the relevant institutional levels.

3.5 The SRS structure is a tiered system of representation, ensuring effective representation at School, College and University levels to reflect the wider University structure. There shall be Student Representatives at each level, with separate recruitment and elections of Student Representatives at each level. Students should be fully aware of the commitment prior to taking the role, so that the SRS has no negative impact on their academic progression.

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.

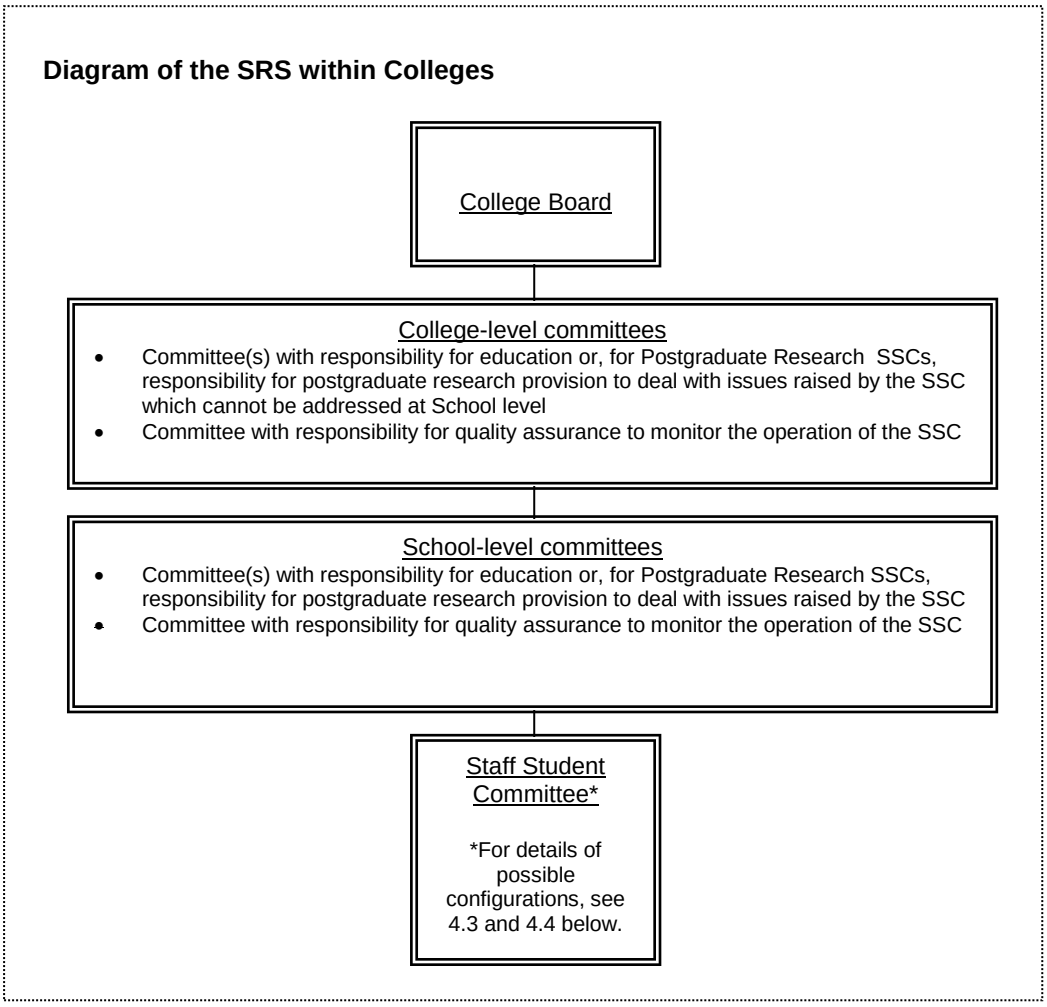

Figure 1. Diagram of the SRS within Colleges.

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 normally expected 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. Minor in-session changes made to SSCs, such as change of Staff Liaison Contact (SLC) or administrative support staff can be approved by College Academic Policy Partners.

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.

4.7 The Guild of Students will facilitate a College Student Representative Forum for each College. The membership of the forum will be comprised of the School Student Representatives, the College Student Representatives, the Guild Officer that has been assigned to the College and the Guild of Students Education Officer. The forum will help facilitate two-way communication between SSCs, School, College and University level committees.

5. Roles, Responsibilities and Functions

5.1 Below is a list of core responsibilities and functions of all parties involved in the student representation system across the University:

5.2 Student Representatives

5.2 .1 Student representatives provide the peer representation essential for the SRS to succeed. They have three key responsibilities:

- To be responsible for gathering student opinion and presenting this in an appropriate and objective form to University staff and the Guild of Students.
- 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.
- 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).

5.3 Staff Liaison Contacts (SLC's)

5.3 .1 The SLC or a nominee will have roles and responsibilities for an SSC (covered in the SRS Operations Manual) to include:

- the recruitment and election of Student Representatives and Senior Student Representatives to the SSC, in accordance with section 6.3;
- being a key point of contact for the Student Representatives;
- providing a SSC/ School level handover and induction for new Student Representatives;

- writing and submitting the Annual SSC Report to the SRSAB, in collaboration with the Student Representative, in the Summer Term;

- coordinating the SSC in conjunction with the administrative staff member assigned to the SSC. This will include the arrangement of meeting dates, times and venues, ensuring that all attendees are aware of these details and sending any relevant papers. This can be delegated to the administrative staff member assigned to the SSC;

- writing and submitting reports, as determined by the SSC, up the representation and University Structure, to School and/or College committees with responsibility for quality assurance, education and postgraduate research, where applicable. These reports should be on matters of concern that cannot be addressed at an SSC level;

- liaising with the Guild of Students with regards to student representation issues.

5.5 Guild of Students

5.5 .1 The Guild of Students will be responsible for:

- the recruitment and election of College Student Representatives in accordance with section 6.3;

- providing assistance and support in the operation of the recruitment and election processes;

- providing centrally organised training and development opportunities for Student Representatives;

- providing assistance and support to both Student Representatives and Staff in the operation of the SRS;

- consulting with staff on any changes to Student Representative numbers and ratio, see 6.3.6;

- working in collaboration with the University to provide academic and administrative resources to facilitate the SRS locally within Colleges and Schools.

- hold a College Student Representative Forum for each college (see 4.7)

5.6 Student Representation System Advisory Board (SRSAB)

5.6 .1 The Student Representation System Advisory Board (SRSAB) will be responsible for:

- monitoring and administering the operation of the SRS;

- having the final say on the interpretation and implementation of SRS supplementary regulations, such as the SRS Election Regulations;

- the SRS Election Complaints Procedure within the SRS;
- final approval for changes to Student Representative numbers and/or ratio at the various levels of the SRS.
- hosting at least one forum per year for all SLC's (in September/ October), which will cover:
  - an introduction to the Guild of Students' Education Officer, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), and to the staff of the Guild of Students and Registry responsible for administrating the SRS;
  - an outline of recent changes and developments within the SRS.
  - key dates in the SRS cycle, including those for the election of representatives, training sessions and reporting dates;
  - an opportunity to provide feedback about the SRS, discuss implementation issues that Schools and Colleges face with regard to the SRS, and to share effective practice.

5.6 .2 The SRSAB has the ability to designate a nominee to take on some of its responsibilities for the day to day operation of the SRS.

5.6 .3 All other SRSAB responsibilities can be found in its Terms of Reference.

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:

- ensuring that an academic staff member is allocated to act as the SLC for each Staff Student Committee (SSC);
- 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);
- notifying the SRSAB (contact studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk) when a new SLC is appointed;
- ensuring that members of staff are allocated to provide administrative support for the SRS at the appropriate level;
- 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.)[i];

- ensuring that SLCs have access to External Examiner report(s) and responses, the School's NSS action plan, the School's / programmes BSS results (where possible), Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Board (PSRB) Reports (where applicable) and summaries of the outcomes of the annual programme review and annual postgraduate research review processes (see 6.5.2);

- ensuring that School Student Representatives are included and treated as full members for committees with responsibility for learning and teaching, quality assurance and programme approval;

6.2 .2 University and Guild of Students staff involved in the SRS should:

- ensure that all responsibilities within the Code of Practice are adhered to;

- develop and enhance working relationships to operate the SRS;

- support each other in recognising and implementing effective practice;

- provide academic and administrative support to both parties.

6.3 Recruitment and Elections

6.3 .1 The recruitment and election of Student Representatives at each tiered level of representation within the Student Representation System should adhere to the Student Representation System Election Regulations (available in SRS Operations Manual). The election process shall be inclusive and democratic aiming to represent the diversity of students within a given School/programme. This will include part-time and distance learning students.

6.3 .2 The operation of any recruitment and election process in the SRS should be undertaken by University of Birmingham and/or Guild of Students Staff members with the following responsibilities observed;

- SLCs have the responsibility of ensuring the recruitment and election of Student Representatives and Senior Student Representatives for their SSC in accordance with the SRS Election Regulations;

- School SRS leads have the responsibility of ensuring the recruitment and election of School Student Representatives, working in partnership with the Guild of Students and in accordance with the SRS Election Regulations;

- The Guild of Students has the responsibility of ensuring the recruitment and election of College Student Representatives in accordance with the SRS Election Regulations.

6.3 .3 The SRSAB, or nominee of the SRSAB, shall normally determine the interpretation and implementation of the SRS Election Regulations, whilst also being responsible for election complaints within the Student Representation

System in accordance with the SRS Complaints Procedure.

6.3 .4 The Guild of Students will support and assist in the election of Student Representatives at the various tiers of the system. The support the Guild of Students offers and how to get this support is described in the SRS Operations Manual. Staff can request this support or a consultation on how the Guild of Students can support by emailing: studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk.

6.3 .5 The number/ratio of Student Representative positions at each tiered level of representation should be fixed at the beginning of the recruitment and election process. The number of positions at each level of the tiered representation system should aim to adhere to the following minimum levels:

6.3 .5 .1 there should be a student representative for each year of each taught programme. The number of student representative positions should work off a ratio of student reps to students/postgraduate researchers. This ratio should be reviewed in consultation with the Guild of Students.

6.3 .5 .2 the number of Senior Student Representatives should be one per SSC;

6.3 .5 .3 the number of School Student Representative positions should be two per school: one position for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programme representation and one position for Postgraduate Research programme representation;

6.3 .5 .4 the number of College Student Representative positions should be two per College: one position for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programme representation and one position for Postgraduate Research Programme Representation.

6.3 .6 The number/ratio of Student Representative positions at each tiered level of representation is flexible in order to cater the system to the needs of individual Schools and Colleges. Changes to Student Representative position numbers/ratio must be consulted on between the individual department and the Guild of Students, before any recruitment and election process occurs, with the final recommendation reported to the SRSAB for approval.

6.3 .7 The positions of Senior Student Representative, School Student Representative and College Student Representative can be shared, in order to not have a detrimental impact on student academic progress. In cases where positions are shared, this should be agreed in consultation with the Guild of Students.

6.3 .8 The operational details of running the recruitment and election processes within the SRS are covered in the SRS Operations Manual. These details include when Student Representative elections are advised to occur at the various tiered levels of representation. This manual will also cover best practice and explanations of the regulations applied to the Recruitment and Election Process. This document will be reviewed and distributed annually to all SLCs and can be requested by emailing studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk.

6.4 Training

6.4 .1 All representatives will be expected to undertake appropriate training.

6.4 .2 The Guild of Students will be responsible for providing centrally organised training to Student Representatives. This training will be catered to the different roles and responsibilities Student Representatives have at each level of the tiered SRS structure.

6.4 .3 The Guild of Students will provide Student Representative and SLCs with information regarding their training programme and how to access this training. It is expected that SLCs will assist in advertising this training to Student Representatives.

6.4 .4 Information of training and development opportunities will be provided in both the SRS Operations Manual and Student Representative Handbook. These documents can be requested by emailing studentreps@guild.bham.ac.uk.

6.4 .5 SLCs will be responsible for providing a Departmental/School handover and induction for all new Student Representatives.

6.4 .6 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.

6.5 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 SSC shall:

- invite a subject librarian. Contact details of Subject librarians can be found here:

https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/libraryservices/library/subject/index.aspx.

- discuss and agree the SSC's annual report to the SRSAB. This should be approved by the SSC Senior Student Representative and SLC prior

to SRSAB submission;

- discuss External Examiner reports and responses, where applicable
- discuss the results and action plans from BSS, NSS, PTES, PRES, PSRB reports and outcomes summaries from Annual Programme Review/ Postgraduate Research Annual Review, see 6.6.4;
- discuss feedback relating to the actions taken by Colleges and the University;

6.5 .3 The Senior Student Representative of the SSC should take the position of Chair or Co-chair, who shares to the role of Chair with the SLC.

6.5 .4 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 .5 How to effectively operate an SSC will be covered in the SRS Operations Manual that SLC's should use as a guide. This will include a Terms of Reference for SSC's which will include the SSC's reporting structure, membership and responsibilities.

6.5 .6 SSCs should operate in an inclusive way in order to fully represent the students on the courses/programmes it represents. This should include provision for part-time and distance learners, where applicable.

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 All Student Representatives will have access to a Student Representative Handbook which will set out the roles and responsibilities of being a Student Representative, and training available.

6.6 .2 SRS Operations Manual will be available to all University and Guild of Students staff with an operational responsibility for the SRS. This SRS Operations Manual will cover all information staff need to operate the SRS, including:

- Recruitment and Election Regulations and guidance;
- support offered by the Guild of Students;
- training for Student Representatives;
- template documents for use within the SRS;
- examples of effective practice within the SRS.

6.6 .3 Dedicated facilities and resources will be made available within appropriate

academic areas for use by those involved in the SRS (including Student Representatives). These facilities can be used for advertising who the Student Representatives are, publicising meeting dates, and asking for and gaining feedback. Resources should include:

- 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;
- access to photocopying and filing space for committee related work;
- access to meeting rooms to hold Student Forums and drop-ins;
- access to all student email lists (through Admin Manager if necessary);
- the opportunity to speak to students at the end of lectures for publicity purposes.

6.6 .4 For the operation of the SRS the following resources should be made available to SSCs, through its SLC, where applicable:

6.6 .4 .1 External Examiner report(s) and responses;

6.6 .4 .2 Subject-specific reports of BSS, NSS, PTES or PRES, where applicable;

6.6 .4 .3 Schools survey action plans for BSS, NSS, PTES or PRES, where applicable;

6.6 .4 .4 Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Board (PSRB) reports, where applicable;

6.6 .4 .5 Summary of outcomes of Annual Programme Review (Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Only);

6.6 .4 .6 Summary of outcomes of Postgraduate Research Annual Review (Postgraduate Research).

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 University-level report. College Directors of Education 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 Code of Practice.

7.5 The SRSAB will also provide the University-level report 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 University-level report, and will also determine if any University-level action is to be taken.

7.7 UEC will then review progress made against the agreed University level actions in the Spring Term.